THE NES ENCYCLOPEDIA

EVERY GAME RELEASED FOR THE

Nintendo

ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE

CHRIS SCULLION

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To my mum and dad for buying me my NES back in 1987. You had no idea you were shaping my life, but I'm so glad you did.

To my wee brother Kevin, for being my player two during the NES days and beyond. Cheers, bold yin.

To my fantastic wife Louise, for putting up with me as I wrote this book. If life is a game, there's nobody in this world I'd rather play co-op with. I love you.

And to my gorgeous baby girl Serena. You're too young to read this book just now, but I can't wait until you grow up and show complete indifference as I try (and fail) to get you to like these dusty old games. No matter what I've done in my life, and no matter how long I live, being your daddy will always be my greatest accomplishment.

FOREWORD

Even though well over three decades have passed since my first encounter with the Nintendo Entertainment System, I remember the occasion with extraordinary clarity. It was back in early 1986 when I was a writer for *ZZAP! 64*, a popular gaming periodical that covered the Commodore 64 microcomputer. I was visiting Activision's London headquarters to preview some of their upcoming games and, after I'd finished playing them, had some time to kill before I caught my train home. While I waited, one of the PR folks asked me whether I was interested in checking out a new games console that they'd just received from the company's US office. They called it a Nintendo, a name I immediately recognised from such classic arcade machines as Donkey Kong, Mario Bros., and Punch Out!!

Needless to say, I was highly intrigued as I was ushered into a back office. On a desk in the corner sat a large TV to which was attached an unassuming two-tone grey box that at first glance looked like a petite VCR. The PR person casually flipped open the door on the front of the machine, picked up what I guessed was a game cartridge – an impressively large one at that – and slipped it into the open slot in the same fashion that you'd load a VHS tape into a video recorder.

Cool!

As the PR person powered on the machine, I reached for the controller. I'd seen thin card-style joypads before, but hadn't ever played with one. It felt alien in my hands; a far cry from the traditional joysticks I was used to using with the Commodore 64. Initially I was all fingers and thumbs as I figured out how to start and play the game – it was called Super Mario Bros. – but soon enough I became familiar with the controller's ergonomics and began to make progress, leaping across hazards, clambering over pipes, and avoiding the many denizens that laid in wait.

I was extremely impressed on a number of levels. The big, smooth-scrolling screen felt akin to an arcade game, the awesome music was earworm catchy, the graphics were gorgeously bright and colorful, and Mario's weight, heft, and momentum made him an utter delight to control. Then I began to discover neat little gameplay details, such as certain blocks containing hidden coins and power-ups. I realised I could bounce on some monsters and squash them, while others would retreat into their shells that I could then launch to take out additional enemies. But the biggest surprise occurred when I accidentally pushed down while I was standing on top of one of the many pipes. My character disappeared and reappeared in an underground room.

My mind was blown! How many more secrets did this game have in store?

I desperately wanted to find out, but shortly thereafter the PR person appeared to tell me that my taxi had arrived to whisk me off to the station. On my way home, all I could think about was how much I wanted a Nintendo. I'd tasted gaming magic and had fallen absolutely head over heels in love with it.

Julian 'Jaz' Rignall
Former editor of *Computer & Video Games*, *Mean Machines*, *Nintendo Magazine System*

INTRODUCTION

The first time I fell in love, I was four years old. It was early 1987 and we were visiting my aunt, who used to live in Scotland with the rest of us but had recently emigrated to America to get married. Sitting there underneath the television, in the living room of her apartment in Parma, Ohio, was an unassuming grey box that my new uncle had just bought weeks before. It was literally about to shape my life.

That trip to America was the first time I met Mario. Super Mario, to be precise. And he was super: I'd never seen anything like this in my life (even though it had been admittedly quite short to that point). I'd dabbled with gaming before: my dad had an Atari VCS and a ZX Spectrum. But I thought this was on a whole new stratosphere. I didn't use those words, of course, being four and all.

When I got back home to Scotland, Mario was all I cared about. The NES didn't exist in the UK yet, so the best I could do was ruin all my children's books by pretending the sentences were Mario stages and drawing a pencil line across the top of them: spaces between words were pits, tall letters were pipes. I was obsessed with a game I didn't even own.

Later that year the NES finally came to the UK, and my dad bought me one with Super Mario Bros. and Mach Rider. The former was every bit as special as I dreamed it would be, and will be covered in depth later on. It's games like the latter, however, that inspired the reason for making this book. Every gamer (current or lapsed) knows Super Mario Bros., or The Legend of Zelda, or Metroid, and naturally these games are all covered in the book. But it's extremely rare for anyone to have only owned the iconic titles and nothing else.

Maybe your parents bought you a wrestling game because you loved the WWF growing up. Maybe you and your brother saved up your money to buy The Ren & Stimpy Show: Buckaroo$! because you both loved the cartoon. Maybe your granny got you Wally Bear and the NO! Gang for your birthday because it was in the bargain bin and she knew you liked video games. Or maybe you enjoyed many a family night in front of the television playing one of the numerous versions of Jeopardy! or Wheel of Fortune.

Most books and articles about video games tend to cover the best or most notable titles, and that makes perfect sense. When you can write about Kid Icarus,

why write about Kid Niki: Radical Ninja? This book asks: 'Why not write about both?'

When I told my brother Kevin that I was writing a book about NES games, the first thing he asked me wasn't how long it was going to be, or when it would be out, or whether I could stop texting him while he was at work. It was: 'Is Low G Man going to be in it?' To me, this perfectly sums up the point of this NES Encyclopedia. The NES was a part of so many gamers' childhoods, but we didn't all share the same cookie-cutter experiences.

Yes, Super Mario Bros. and Tetris and Contra were part of so many of our childhoods, and those itches will be scratched here. But Low G Man was my brother's childhood too. Tecmo World Wrestling was my childhood. One of my friends in school won a copy of Section Z in the *UK Club Nintendo* magazine: that was his childhood. We all love the big games, but the small ones have a place in our hearts too. If you owned an NES or knew someone who did, my aim with this book is to ensure that your childhood is in here too.

Nintendo entered my life at the age of the four and never left it. I've spent my life playing video games, many of which were on Nintendo systems. From as early as I was able to read, I read as many Nintendo magazines as I could get my hands on (especially anything written by my childhood hero, Julian Rignall). I'm now 35 and I've been a video game journalist for well over a decade (with six years spent at the *UK Official Nintendo Magazine*).

Nintendo was my childhood, Nintendo is my adulthood. And the NES started all of that.

I hope you enjoy this book: if you do (or don't) please send me a message on Twitter @scully1888 and let me know. Thank you so much for reading it: with any luck, there may be more to follow.

Chris Scullion

THE HISTORY OF THE NES

The Nintendo Entertainment System might never have existed. When we look back now at what it achieved – 35 million sold in North America alone – and consider how it launched such iconic gaming series as Super Mario Bros., The Legend of Zelda and Metroid, hindsight makes it difficult to consider the NES as anything other than a sure-fire success. For a while, though, there was a good chance it may have failed to see the light of day, the crumbling American video game industry threatening to bury it in its rubble before it even appeared on the shelves.

Founded in 1889, the Kyoto-based Nintendo spent decades mainly devoted to the manufacture of playing cards before the decline in their popularity forced it to branch out into other fields. Folklore says that throughout the '60s the company tried out everything from taxi services and TV channels to instant noodles and hourly-rate 'love hotels'. These claims should be taken with a pinch of salt, however, as it's likely that some of these ventures were separate businesses launched by Nintendo owner Hiroshi Yamauchi, rather than specifically Nintendo-branded ones.

One thing Nintendo certainly did dabble in, however, is toymaking. After its maintenance engineer Gunpei Yokoi invented an extendable

grabbing device during his free time, Nintendo decided to make it into a proper product called the Ultra Hand. Over a million were sold, and its success led to more Yokoi-developed toys like the Ultra Machine (an automatic baseball-launching device) and the Love Tester.

The birth of video games presented a new avenue for Nintendo's experimentation. In 1977 it launched the Color TV-Game 6, the first of five Color TV-Game devices which plugged into the user's television and offered a number of variations on a single game type (in this case it was the Pong-like Light Tennis). In 1978, after previous experiments in arcades with shooting games using 16mm video, it released its first sprite-based arcade game, Computer Othello. More notably, in 1980 Gunpei Yokoi created the Game & Watch, which would become an immensely popular series of handheld LCD games.

Throughout the early 1980s Nintendo found its greatest success in the arcades, with games like Donkey Kong (1981), Donkey Kong Jr (1982), Popeye (1982) and Mario Bros. (1983) proving enormously popular not only with Japanese gamers, but players worldwide too.

Arcade accomplishments were one thing, but as a company still enjoying the fruits of its toy-making division Nintendo wanted to infiltrate the household too. On 15 July 1983 the Family Computer, Nintendo's first major home console, was born. Dubbed the Famicom by most gamers, it was clear by its three launch games – Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Jr and Popeye – that the Famicom's initial selling point was the ability to play Nintendo's arcade hits at home. Although initial sales were relatively slow (partly due to reports of faulty motherboards causing crashes), a redesigned chip set eventually saw momentum build, and by the end of 1984 the Famicom was an enormous success in Japan.

It was time to take the Famicom to the west, starting with America, but there was a problem: gaming was dead there. While the games market remained relatively healthy in Europe (the UK in particular) thanks to homegrown 'bedroom' coders making games for home computers like the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64, in North America it was a different story: Atari and arcades had been king there, and both were flatlining.

The Atari VCS (later renamed the 2600) had started as a huge success, but a series of big-name disappointments – most notably Pac-Man and E.T. – had put a massive dent in customers' faith, and the sea of awful third-party 'shovelware' jumping on the bandwagon eventually weighed said bandwagon down to the extent that the whole thing collapsed in what was known as the video game crash of 1983. Games that launched for $35 were being jammed into $5 bargain bins and still weren't selling, while arcades up and down the country closed their doors. As far as America was concerned, gaming was a fad, and it was over.

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Allders Department Stores
Toy & Hobby
Argos Superstores
Telegames
Computer Magic
Arding & Hobbs
John Farnon
Willis Ludlow
Selfridges
Telebank
Harrods
See Nintendo demonstrated at Harrods, or at Selfridges computer department, Oxford Street, August 3rd – 8th, and Hamleys of Regent Street, London, August 10th – 15th.

Enter Nintendo, with its plans to bring the Famicom to the States. After a proposed distribution partnership with Atari collapsed, Nintendo decided to go it alone and launch the Famicom itself. It attended the Summer Consumer Electronics Show in 1983 with its redesigned Famicom, dubbed the AVS: the Advanced Video System (see the image on page 8). Clad in space-age silver, it consisted of a full keyboard, a joystick, two small infrared controllers, a sci-fi gun and a cassette deck for recording data. The AVS saw no takers: retailers weren't interested in taking a risk on another video game system, not when they were already struggling to get rid of the heavily discounted stock of previous ones they were stuck with.

Nintendo went back to the drawing board and returned two years later with a new design, a new accessory and a new name: the Nintendo Entertainment System. By positioning the NES as an entertainment centre instead of a games console, Nintendo was able to appeal to retailers without ever having to put the now toxic idea of 'video games' into their head. All the terminology that made retailers run a mile had been replaced with something different. The main NES unit itself wasn't a console, it was a 'control deck'. It didn't play cartridges, it played 'game paks'. This point was driven home further by a newly-created Trojan horse, or Trojan robot if you will.

The Robotic Operating Buddy, or R.O.B. for short, was a 10 inch (25cm) battery-powered robot that sat alongside the player and watched the TV with them, reacting to certain actions or moments accordingly. R.O.B. may have ultimately been a fairly useless accessory with only two mediocre games to his name, but he looked cool and robots were massive in the '80s, so he served his actual purpose well: to convince retailers that the NES wasn't just another video game system.

The Nintendo Entertainment System 'soft-launched' in New York on 18 October 1985, with around 100,000 units distributed to the likes of FAO Schwarz, Sears and Macy's. Los Angeles got its first stock the following February, and by the end of September 1986 the NES had launched nationwide. Most of mainland Europe also began to receive it in 1986 via various distributors, although this process

THE FIRST TO MOVE VIDEO ACTION OFF THE SCREEN.

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Introducing R.O.B.™ your Robotic Operating Buddy. The world's first video robot. He's your teammate, programmed to help you tackle the challenge at hand. Send him signals by way of the TV screen and he will obey your every command. It's the first opportunity to experience video action in a whole new dimension, in a whole new place—off the screen.

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Inside the Nintendo Control Deck are two microchips. Not just chips off the old block, mind you.

It takes highly unique, custom-designed microchips to run R.O.B., activate the Zapper and display such realistic graphics.

In fact, you won't find microchips like these anywhere else.

GAMES, GAMES, GAMES, AND MORE GAMES.

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Choose from our authentic Sports Series, high flying Action Series, R.O.B. the Robot Series, Light Gun Series and more.

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We've spent a lot of time and research developing a system that would last for years. That's why we'll constantly be creating new components and new games to keep the thrill of the Nintendo Entertainment System growing.

And that's also why, as years go by, you'll be as wide-eyed about the system as you were the day you bought it.

Nintendo

The Nintendo Entertainment System comes complete with—R.O.B., Zapper, Control Deck, two Controllers, and the Gyromite™ and Duck Hunt™ Game Paks.

wasn't quite as smooth. Some areas – like the UK and Ireland, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Australia and New Zealand – didn't get it until 1987, courtesy of toy company Mattel.

As the years went on, the NES became a huge success, especially in North America: a particularly impressive feat given that gaming's name was as good as mud to both retailers and the general public when it made its debut. The steady release of games like Super Mario Bros., The Legend of Zelda, Metroid, Tetris, Contra, Castlevania and Punch-Out!! ensured that the quality shone through.

What about the other games? That's what this book is for.

LICENSED GAMES

The video game crash of 1983 was mainly due to the slew of poor quality games, especially those available for the Atari 2600. The initial success of Atari's console encouraged third parties to jump aboard and try to get a piece of what seemed to be a lucrative cash cow. The problem was, so many of these games were of such a low standard that customers were sick of buying garbage and the 'fool me twice, shame on me' rule came into play. Tired of being burned by barely working products, the public abandoned video games in droves.

Eager to make sure the same mistakes weren't made, Nintendo set up a licensing system for its games in an attempt to make sure that nobody could make a game for the NES unless it gave permission. Publishers would have to jump through a number of hoops to get their games onto Nintendo's system: in theory, this would have meant that anyone making a cheap low-quality game in search of a quick and easy buck wouldn't have wanted to go through all the rigmarole.

In order that Nintendo could control the games appearing on its system, publishers had to agree to a strict set of licensing requirements. Nintendo was the only company that was allowed to manufacture NES cartridges, and publishers had to pay for them all in advance. They had to buy a minimum of 10,000, and any unsold cartridges couldn't be returned to Nintendo, so publishers had to be sure their game was good enough to sell before going ahead with the process.

Another requirement of the licensing deal was that publishers could release no more than five games per year. While the reasoning for this was valid – Nintendo wanted to make sure a bunch of sloppily, hastily-developed games weren't dumped onto the system – it frustrated some larger publishers who had the capacity to make more than five decent-quality games within the space of 12 months. Most publishers put up with it, but Konami chose not to: it set up two new companies, Ultra Games in North America and Palcom in Europe. Since these were considered brand new entities, this increased Konami's quota to 10 games a year.

All games officially licensed by Nintendo received the iconic Nintendo Seal of Quality, a small golden emblem that appeared on the game box and cartridge. Contrary to what some believed, the Seal of Quality wasn't a promise that the game in question was a 'quality' title that was great fun to play: it was simply a promise that the game had met Nintendo's quality control standards; had met a basic level of programming competence, wasn't plagued with game-breaking bugs and essentially just worked on the NES. Somewhat controversially, the Seal of Quality was also an assurance that the game met certain family-friendly criteria. This meant that if a game had bad language, excessive gory violence or any religious iconography whatsoever, Nintendo wouldn't approve it.

In all, there were a total of 714 officially licensed games for the Nintendo Entertainment System. These range from the ones everyone knows and loves – Super Mario Bros., The Legend of Zelda and the like – to exceptionally rare titles like Stadium Events and Nintendo's competition cartridges. You'll find them all in this section, along with notes on whether they were released in North America or Europe. Bear in mind that there were two different European regions: PAL-A consoles are those released in the UK, Ireland, Italy, Australia and New Zealand, while PAL-B ones are those released elsewhere in Europe. Games from one region won't work in the other, although an easy 10-minute modification to your NES (involving removing a single pin with a screwdriver) can undo the region-lock. There are numerous guides online showing how to do this.

Official Nintendo Seal of Quality

Licensed by Nintendo for play on the Nintendo Entertainment System®

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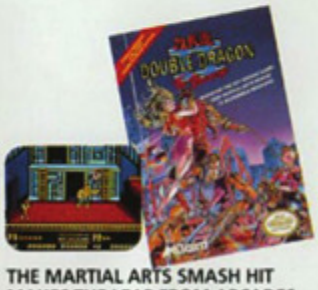

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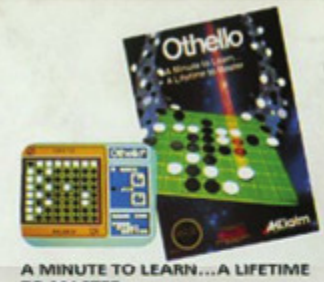

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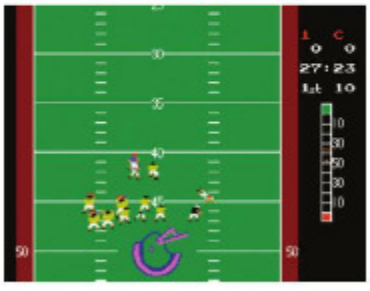
ACL-W2-US

10-YARD FIGHT

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Irem



JAPANESE STUDIO IREM originally released its American football sim 10-Yard Fight as an arcade game in 1983. While the Famicom version had the same high-score focused gameplay, this NES port – which was a launch title in the US – actually played differently. In the arcade and Famicom versions the player only ever plays as the offensive team: the goal is to score a single touchdown before time runs out, at which point you then move on to the next, more difficult opponent. The NES version, on the other hand, plays more like normal American football, with a standard 'six points for a touchdown' scoring system and the player getting to control both offence and defence. ■

FACT

Irem's early Famicom cartridges, including 10-Yard Fight, had a red LED light in the middle of them. When you switched on the console, the cartridge lit up.

1942

Year 1986
Publisher Capcom
Developer Micronics

A PORT OF the first game in Capcom's 19XX series of vertically-scrolling shoot 'em up games. Set during the Pacific War in the Second World War , the player takes on the role of a US pilot who has to blast their way through Japanese planes until he reaches Tokyo (an odd premise given that Capcom is a Japanese developer). As a relatively early NES game it wasn't the most accurate port – the frame rate and sound effects are significantly weaker than those of the arcade game released two years prior – but it was still one of the best examples of the genre in the home console market at the time, and with 32 lengthy stages it certainly took a while to master. ■

FACT

The plane in 1942 is a Lockheed P-38 Lightning, the same type which was flown by Richard Bong in the Second World War. He was America's top ace, credited with shooting down 40 Japanese planes.

1943: THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY

Year 1988
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

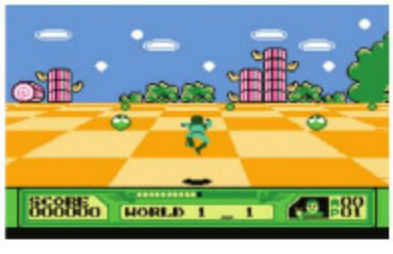
1942 WAS SUCH a successful arcade game, it made logical sense that a sequel would follow, and made similarly logical sense that it would be called 1943. Still set in the Pacific theatre, this time you're getting revenge on the Japanese air fleet that bombed an American aircraft carrier, with the ultimate goal being the destruction of *Yamato*, a Japanese battleship. Whereas the NES version of 1942 was a straight port (albeit a weaker one), this time it actually offers more than its arcade counterpart. Players can upgrade their plane, choosing whether to enhance its attacking or defensive power, fuel and special weapons. As well as offering more depth than its predecessor, then, it also has a vastly improved frame rate making for smoother action. ■

FACT

Although only two 19XX games were released on the NES, there were eventually seven games in the series, including a remake of 1943 called 1943 Kai complete with odd new additions like laser-firing Second World War planes.

THE 3-D BATTLES OF WORLDRUNNER

Year 1987
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Square



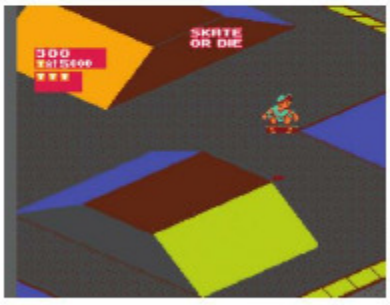
DESPITE ONLY APPEARING a year and a half into the NES's life, it's fair to say this Square-developed rail shooter is one of the most impressive-looking games on the system. It's little wonder, given that designer Hironobu Sakaguchi, programmer Nasir Gebelli and composer Nobuo Uematsu would all later become famous as the main team behind Final Fantasy. Bearing more than a passing resemblance to Sega's Space Harrier, 3-D WorldRunner (as the US box calls it) is a third-person game in which you run, leap and shoot through pseudo 3D environments. It's actually a proper 3D game too: by pressing the Select button you can toggle a 3D view that can be played with standard red and cyan anaglyph glasses. ■

FACT

The game's hero Jack made an appearance 12 years later as an unlockable character in Square's PlayStation game Chocobo Racing.

720°

Year 1989
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Beam Software



BASED ON THE Atari arcade game, 720° took full advantage of the '80s skateboarding craze by offering this pseudo free-roaming effort. As a young chap with little more than a grin on his face, a skateboard under his feet and $100 in his back pocket (which was a lot in those days, let me tell you), you have to skate around your town, entering competitions and earning more money to upgrade your equipment. If you take too long the message 'SKATE OR DIE' will appear and you'll be chased by a swarm of bees: a skateboarder's worst enemy (probably). Get caught by the bees and it's an instant Game Over. Harsh. ■

FACT

The arcade version of 720° came in a bigger cabinet than usual, and the speakers sat on the top like a skater's boombox.

8 EYES

Year 1990
Publisher Taxan
Developer Thinking Rabbit

POST-APOCALYPTIC FUTURES AND video games regularly go hand-in-hand, and 8 Eyes is the umpteenth example of this. After eight nuclear explosions nearly destroy the Earth, the jewels ('eyes') that mysteriously formed at their centres are gathered by greedy dukes who want to harness their power. At the behest of the Great King – who wants to rebuild the Earth – Orin the Falconer and his falcon pal Cutrus head out to defeat the dukes and gather the eight eyes. The result is a game that looks a lot like Castlevania, borrows from Mega Man (when you kill a duke you get a new sword which can be used to easily defeat another), and ultimately isn't as enjoyable as either. ■

FACT

8 Eyes has a two player co-op mode in which player 2 controls the falcon. It's actually far more entertaining to play this way.

ABADOX: THE DEADLY INNER WAR

Year 1990
Publisher Milton Bradley
Developer Natsume

IT MAY LOOK like a standard shoot 'em up, but Abadox has an interesting plot to back it up. Set in the year 5012, a massive alien creature called Parasitis has swallowed the entire planet of Abadox and now plans to eat others. Playing as Second Lieutenant Nazal, you have to enter Parasitis and shoot your way through Abadox to find and rescue its princess, before blasting your way out of the alien's rectum to escape. Not content with this novelty, Abadox also messes around with standard shooter convention: some of its levels switch from side-scrolling to vertical scrolling, but the twist is you travel downwards rather than up. Which makes sense when you consider where you're headed. ■

FACT

Abadox is notorious for being extremely difficult. If you die in later stages you lose all your power-ups, which can make things even harder than they already are.

THE ADDAMS FAMILY

Year 1992
Publisher Ocean
Developer Ocean

THE ADDAMS FAMILY was big in the early '90s thanks to the big-budget 1991 movie. A video game tie-in was promptly delivered, but while 16-bit systems like the SNES and Mega Drive got one game, the NES got another. The plot is the same in both versions – evil lawyer Tully Alford has seized the Addams mansion to steal its riches, so it's up to Gomez to rescue his imprisoned family members and get the house back – but the actual gameplay is different on the NES. The mansion has a series of puzzles which are solved by finding certain members: for example, if you rescue Wednesday from the freezer and bring her to the furnace, she'll thaw out and give you the attic key. ■

FACT

Raul Julia, who played Gomez in the movie, went on to portray M. Bison in the Street Fighter movie starring Jean Claude Van Damme.

THE ADDAMS FAMILY: PUGSLEY'S SCAVENGER HUNT

Year 1993
Publisher Ocean
Developer Ocean

THE SUCCESS OF the Addams Family movie spawned an animated series, which in turn spawned its own video game tie-in. Once again the NES version differed from the 16-bit one, but in an interesting way: it's actually a port of the previous 16-bit Addams Family game, with Pugsley replacing Gomez as the lead character. It's not a perfect port, though: many of the levels are cut down or outright removed, the weapon power-ups are missing and other than on the title screen there's no music at all. Still, it was nice for NES owners to finally get a version of the Addams Family game they'd missed out on... although this of course meant they missed out on the actual 'proper' 16-bit Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt game as a result. ■

FACT

The voice of Gomez in the 1990s animated series was actually provided by John Astin, who had played him 30 years earlier in the original live-action TV show.

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HEROES OF THE LANCE

Year 1991
Publisher FCI
Developers US Gold / Strategic Simulations

THE FIRST IN a series of AD&D games for the NES, Heroes of the Lance was based on the Dragonlance novels. Rather than a conventional RPG, it's instead a side-scrolling action game in which the player takes control of eight heroes as they attempt to retrieve the revered Disks of Mishakal from a dragon called Khisanth. Unfortunately, Heroes of the Lance didn't go down too well: its bland backgrounds, clunky controls, infuriating deaths and the fact you can beat the final boss with literally a single shot mean it's widely considered by many to be one of the worst games on the NES. Not to worry though: as you can see publisher FCI would go on to have plenty more attempts. ■

FACT

If the game's final one-hit boss wasn't already easy enough, the instruction manual explicitly explains in detail how to beat it.

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: POOL OF RADIANCE

Year 1992
Publisher FCI
Developer Strategic Simulations

THE SECOND AD&D game to arrive on the NES (and actually the first created, it just took a while to get ported over), Pool of Radiance is more like a typical RPG adventure than Heroes of the Lance. After building a party of six characters, the player has to drive the monsters from the outskirts of the city of Phlan so it can rebuild itself into the thriving trade community it used to be. While most of the gameplay takes place from a first-person perspective, whenever you get into a fight the action switches to a side-on view and the battle plays out in a basic tactical RPG style. ■

FACT

Pool of Radiance was so popular among AD&D fans that a novel was written about it, which then became a trilogy: *Pool of Radiance*, *Pools of Darkness* and *Pool of Twilight*.

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: DRAGONSTRIKE

Year 1992
Publisher FCI
Developer Westwood Associates

ANOTHER WILDLY DIFFERENT AD&D game, DragonStrike is a top-down shooter in which you ride atop a metallic dragon, scouring the land of Ansalon in search of evil Dragonarmy members to defeat. Rather than simply scrolling horizontally or vertically, DragonStrike lets you freely travel in any direction. It's also unique in that it has an elevation system: your dragon can toggle between flying high in the air and low near the ground. Flying low lets you avoid dragon attacks, but also makes it possible to hit scenery and take damage. This elevation system made the game notoriously difficult, as it's sometimes tricky to tell whether enemies should be approached from the higher or lower plane. ■

FACT

A board game version of DragonStrike was released a year later. Aimed at D&D beginners, it came with a 30-minute VHS tape explaining how role-playing board games work.

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HILLSFAR

Year 1993
Publisher FCI
Developer TSR

THE FOURTH AND final AD&D game released on the NES returned to a more traditional RPG style. This time the player controls a single character instead of a team, and the game has you entering the tightly controlled city of Hillsfar seeking fortune, fame and the chance to get one over on the nasty merchant-mage Maalthir. He's declared himself the First Lord of Hillsfar, so the lad's clearly got himself a bit of an ego. The display in Hillsfar switches between three different viewpoints: side-on when travelling between locations, top-down when exploring villages and first-person when exploring caves. Its small quests and tasks meant reaction was mixed, with some criticising its lack of depth. ■

FACT

A fifth AD&D game, Dragons of Flame, was released on the Famicom in Japan but never made it across the pond to the NES.

ADVENTURE ISLAND

Year 1988
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

HUDSON SOFT'S SIDE-SCROLLING platformer initially started as a port of Sega's Wonder Boy before the studio decided to redesign the lead character after its spokesman Takahashi Meijin. Renamed Master Higgins in the west, the slightly chubby hero has to rescue Princess Leilani from the generically-named Evil Witch Doctor by collecting fruit to keep his depleting health topped up while running and skating his way through 32 stages. Yes, skating. You see, throughout the game are a number of eggs which can be broken to reveal weapons (including a trusty stone axe) and a skateboard, which allows for faster travel but can be tricky to control. ■

FACT

As well as being the inspiration for Adventure Island's hero, Takahashi Meijin was also famous for his ability to press controller buttons quickly: up to 16 presses a second.

ADVENTURE ISLAND II

Year 1991
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Now Production

WHILE THE FIRST Adventure Island was based on Wonder Boy, the sequel was a completely original game. It still uses the same engine and features most of the same gameplay mechanics, though. This time Princess Leilani's sister Tina is the one who's been kidnapped by the Evil Witch Doctor, meaning Master Higgins has to head out on another rescue mission. New features include an inventory system (which lets you choose which item to equip yourself with before starting a new stage), and the addition of four dinosaur-like creatures which you can ride to take advantage of their special abilities. For example, the pteranodon can fly and drop boulders, while the elasmosaurus can swim quickly underwater. ■

FACT

An elasmosaurus was a type of plesiosaur with an extremely long neck. It was basically the giraffe of the underwater dinosaur world.

ADVENTURE ISLAND 3

Year 1992
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Now Production

EUROPE HAD SEEMINGLY had its fill of Master Higgins after two games, but the chubby funster returned for a third outing in North America. The new damsel in distress goes by the name of Jeannie Jungle, and this time it's aliens who have been doing the capturing: seemingly the Evil Witch Doctor had had his fill too. Master Higgins can duck for the first time in this game, and there's now a fifth dinosaur character, a tripetaurus, which has a rolling attack. If you aren't familiar with the tripetaurus species, that's because it didn't exist: it's basically just a fancy triceratops. There was also a surfing bonus game this time around. ■

FACT

Master Higgins would return in a fourth Adventure Island in Japan for the Famicom in 1994. Adventure Island IV ended up being the last game released for the Famicom.

ADVENTURES IN THE MAGIC KINGDOM

Year 1990
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

DISNEY'S THEME PARKS have always been a place of wonder so a video game in which you explore one of them makes perfect sense. Adventures in the Magic Kingdom features five different stages, each themed around a famous Disney ride. There are two platforming sections based on Pirates of the Caribbean and the Haunted Mansion, two vehicle sections based on Big Thunder Mountain and Autopia, and a strange Space Mountain level where you have to quickly respond to button prompts, similar to a quick time event in modern games. The aim is to clear all of these stages (and answer the trivia questions dotted around the park) to collect silver keys that will open Cinderella's Castle and let the Disney parade begin. ■

FACT

Adventures in the Magic Kingdom's music was composed by Yoko Shimomura, who went on to score the Kingdom Hearts games.

THE ADVENTURES OF BAYOU BILLY

Year 1989
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

IT MAY BE more or less forgotten these days but in the late 1980s *Crocodile Dundee* was one of the biggest movies in America. The Adventures of Bayou Billy clearly took some inspiration from it, but instead of Australia the game's set in New Orleans. The player controls Billy West (not the guy who does the voices in Futurama), a former soldier who has to rescue his girlfriend Annabelle from New Orleans crime boss Godfather Gordon. This involves nine stages comprising three completely different play styles. While most of the game is a side-scrolling beat 'em up in the style of Double Dragon, other stages involve driving sections and, most memorably, lightgun stages in which the player can use an NES Zapper to take out enemies. ■

FACT

Bayou Billy may not have been a smash hit but Nintendo pushed it to the point that Billy featured in an episode of its cartoon series *Captain N*.

ADVENTURES OF DINO RIKI

Year 1989
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

DINO RIKI IS a 'courageous and intelligent young man [...] determined to establish mankind's future in this violent age'. The violent age in question is the prehistoric era, which means what we have here is a vertical scrolling shoot 'em up in which instead of flying a ship through space, you're a caveman wandering through the land. Typical schmup weapons like lasers and missiles are ditched in favour of rocks, axes, boomerangs and flaming torches. One of the game's oddest power-ups transforms Dino Riki into Macho Riki, a powerful alter-ego who can fire clones of himself at enemies. It only lasts for a while, though, and when it runs out you lose all your weapon upgrades. Oddly, this made it a power-up players actively tried to avoid. ■

FACT

Dino Riki's appearance was based on Korean-Japanese wrestler Riki Choshu, who appeared in TV ads for the game.

THE ADVENTURES OF GILLIGAN'S ISLAND

Year 1990
Publisher Bandai
Developer Human Entertainment

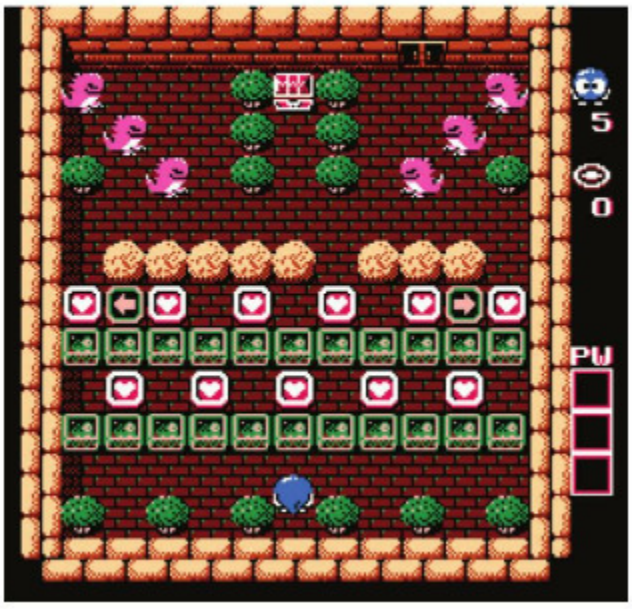
FOR SOME REASON, Bandai America decided that the perfect game for children in the early '90s was one based on a TV sitcom from the 1960s. Split into four 'episodes' (levels), the game has Gilligan and the Skipper exploring the tropical island from the show in an attempt to find a way off it. Along the way they encounter their fellow Gilligan's Island castaways and take part in boss battles with a gorilla, a bear, a skeleton and a cannibal. In an interesting move, there's a dialogue box at the bottom of the screen, where Gilligan and the Skipper continuously have conversations as you play. Sadly, these can get pretty repetitive, meaning they become more of an annoyance than anything else. ■

FACT

The only character missing from the game is Ginger, played by Tina Louise. This may have been because she refused to have anything to do with the show after it ended.

ADVENTURES OF LOLO

Year	1989
Publisher	HAL Laboratory
Developer	HAL Laboratory



BEFORE THE LATE Satoru Iwata joined Nintendo and eventually became its president, he had been working at HAL Laboratory for 20 years. One of the early series he worked on was Eggerland, a bunch of puzzle games in which a little blue blob called Lolo had to move blocks around to clear a number of stages. After a couple of Japan-only releases, Eggerland finally made its way overseas in Adventures of Lolo, an NES game which was really just a compilation of stages taken from its predecessors and presented to a western audience for the first time.

The joy in Adventures of Lolo lies in its simplicity. Lolo can only really move in four directions, push blocks and occasionally gain the ability to fire a total of two shots at enemies per stage. This limited moveset means you're able to quickly master everything Lolo can do, meaning all your attention can be focused on the game's 50 challenging stages full of traps, enemies and treasure chests.

In another world, Lolo could have gone on to become HAL's main mascot and one of the most recognisable characters in gaming. Instead, a couple of years later HAL got to work on a Game Boy title called Kirby's Dream Land and Lolo quickly took a back seat. That's not to say he didn't enjoy some time in the spotlight, though. Between Japan and the west, a total of twelve Eggerland games were released. Lolo may have been a one-trick pony – well, a one-trick blob – but it's a good trick. ■

FACT

Lolo and his female counterpart Lala did actually make appearances in a handful of Kirby games. Interestingly, though, they're enemies. Must be bitter.

ADVENTURES OF LOLO 2

Year	1990
Publisher	HAL Laboratory
Developer	HAL Laboratory

THE PHRASE 'IF it ain't broke, don't fix it' has rarely been more closely adhered to than in the second Adventures of Lolo game. Sit a screenshot of the first and second game next to each other and you'd be hard pressed to tell them apart: other than some new animations like enemies disappearing in a puff of smoke when you beat a level, the two look identical. Still, fans of the game were happy with what was essentially just 50 more levels of what they'd enjoyed in the first Lolo, and all was well in the world.

Lolo 2 isn't a complete clone, mind you: one of the few new additions is the 'pro' levels, four new stages (unlocked with the passwords PROA, PROB, PROC and PROD) which are obscenely difficult to solve. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of Adventures of Lolo 2 is considered a separate game, since the majority of its levels are completely different.

ADVENTURES OF LOLO 3

Year	1991
Publisher	HAL Laboratory
Developer	HAL Laboratory

UNLIKE THE SECOND Lolo game, the third does actually mix things up a little. Rather than having Lolo rescue Lala yet again, this time the pair are teaming up to stop the evil King Egger, who's turned everyone into stone. This means you can now play any stage as either Lolo or Lala (though their abilities are identical). A new world map has been added which adds a small degree of choice to which stages you take on next, and new gameplay elements like boss fights, crumbling bridges and and a new whale enemy called Moby allow for new puzzle mechanics. It's notably trickier than its predecessors, but this time you have infinite lives. ■

FACT

The only other Lolo game released in the west was Adventures of Lolo on the Game Boy, where you have to solve puzzles to get theme park rides working again.

THE ADVENTURES OF RAD GRAVITY

Year 1990
Publisher Activision
Developer Interplay

RAD GRAVITY IS a space hero with an unusually large chin. He's been tasked with travelling to eight different planets and locating the missing Compuminds – which connect to each other and share knowledge like a big interplanetary internet – to foil the evil wizard Agathos, who shut them down. The result is an action platformer in which each planet has a unique look. The most infamous of these is Turvia, a planet where gravity is reversed and everything on the screen is therefore upside-down. Rad Gravity never went down as a truly iconic NES release by any means, but any game with a trash planet called Effluvia can never be considered a waste of time. ■

FACT

The game's manual includes a 14-page comic illustrated by Frank Cirocco, who was best known for co-creating Marvel's Alien Legion series.

THE ADVENTURES OF ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE AND FRIENDS

Year 1992
Publisher THQ
Developer Radical Entertainment

IN TERMS OF plots, this one's a doozy. Rocky and Bullwinkle – stars of the '60s cartoon series of the same name – have to make their way to England so that Bullwinkle can inherit his late grandfather's title of Earl of Moosechester. The problem is, they have to get there before their rivals Boris and Natasha, who plan to impersonate Bullwinkle and get the riches first. Licensed platform games vary wildly in difficulty but this is one of the worst: the music is off-key and repetitive, the level design is confusing, Rocky can't climb stairs and Bullwinkle's attack drains his energy, meaning killing enemies hurts you too. ■

FACT

June Foray, the voice of Rocky in the cartoon show, was also the voice of the Looney Tunes character Granny for more than 50 years.

THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER

Year 1989
Publisher SETA
Developer Winkysoft

MARK TWAIN'S FAMOUS 1876 novel may seem like an odd source for a video game, and it would appear SETA and Winkysoft agreed, since this NES rendition has very little to do with the book. The entire game takes place in one of Tom's dreams (he's fallen asleep at school), and the player has to rescue Becky Thatcher from his nemesis Injun Joe by making his way through six enemy-infested stages. Oddly, the North American version of the game had its levels shuffled, meaning it starts with the difficult pirate ship stage (the fifth in the Japanese version). This makes for a game which starts off much harder than it does in Japan. ■

FACT

It seems SETA didn't fancy the player's chances at beating this game much: the manual has a page dedicated to revealing in detail what happens at the end.

AIR FORTRESS

Year 1989
Publisher HAL Laboratory
Developer HAL Laboratory

A FLEET OF exploratory spaceships from the planet Farmel have discovered eight massive space fortresses heading towards Farmel to destroy it. It's up to ace pilot Hal Bailman to fly solo into each fortress and destroy it from the inside, a la *Independence Day*. This process actually consists of two game styles: each stage begins as a side-scrolling shoot 'em up in which Hal (named after the developer) flies his ship towards one of the fortresses. Once he gets inside it, the action switches to a side-scrolling action platformer where the player has to find and destroy the central reactor then escape before the fortress explodes. An impressive game that further cemented HAL's status as a top NES developer. ■

FACT

The password for the last level is SUGA. This is a reference to Hiroaki Suga, the game's director, designer and programmer.

AIRWOLF

Year 1989
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Beam Software

AIRWOLF WAS AN '80s TV series about a military helicopter armed to the teeth with a crazy amount of high-tech gadgetry. This NES rendition has the show's main hero Stringfellow Hawke flying to a series of POW camps and attempting to rescue all the MIA prisoners being held captive there. Like many other flight sims of the time, the game's mainly played with a first-person viewpoint as you attempt to shoot down enemy fighters. When you reach a camp the screen switches to a side-on view as you try to slowly land and collect the prisoners. A Japanese Airwolf game was also released but it was a side-scrolling shooter and was completely different. ■

FACT

The real *Airwolf* chopper that featured in the show became an air ambulance in Germany. Tragically, it crashed in a thunderstorm in 1992, killing its crew.

AL UNSER JR'S TURBO RACING

Year 1990
Publisher Data East
Developer Data East

DESPITE THE PRESENCE of two-time Indy 500 winner Al Unser Jr, Turbo Racing is actually a game based on Formula One racing. That's because it's an English language version of Famicom title World Grand Prix: Pole to Finish, with Mr Unser Jr only really there to pop up from time to time and give advice on your upcoming race. The game itself is a relatively accomplished racing game which received some criticism for the way its turns appear with little warning. Given that Al Unser Jr isn't so famous in Europe, the PAL version of the game was simply called Turbo Racing and all references to him were removed. ■

FACT

Although the game's tracks were loosely based on real-life F1 Grand Prix circuits, which all have distinct lengths, here they're all roughly 3.3 miles (5.3 km).

ALADDIN

Year 1994
Publisher Virgin Interactive
Developer NMS Software

ALTHOUGH CAPCOM RELEASED an Aladdin game for the SNES, the NES version (released only in Europe) was instead based on the Mega Drive game originally developed by Virgin Games. While the 16-bit version was widely praised for its outstanding character animation and music, the NES port struggled to reach the same level of quality. Movement is sluggish, large sections of the screen disappear without warning and attacking your enemies can literally be a hit and miss affair, as apples thrown at foes often don't register. This culminates in a final boss battle with the evil Jafar, who just stands there while you lob fruit at him from a distance until he dies. ■

FACT

Another version of Aladdin was released on the NES; this was a surprisingly good but completely unofficial port of the SNES game.

ALFRED CHICKEN

Year 1993
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Twilight

EASILY THE MOST popular video game hero named Alfred, our hen-like hero has to rescue Billy and Floella from the evil Meka-Chickens. Who are Billy and Floella? The game doesn't quite specify, I'm afraid. Regardless, there are five large stages which Alfred has to navigate, armed with his trusty divebomb move which lets him plummet to the ground and attack enemies with his beak. Alfred Chicken is notorious for its divisive main theme: some believe its circus-style riff is fun, others are adamant it's one of the worst soundtracks in gaming. A toll-free number (1-800-ALFREDC) was also set up in the US so players could hear a message from Alfred himself promoting the game. ■

FACT

As a UK publicity stunt, the game's product manager stood for election in Dorset representing the Alfred Chicken Party. He finished 13th out of 14 candidates, with 0.02 per cent of the vote.

ALIEN 3

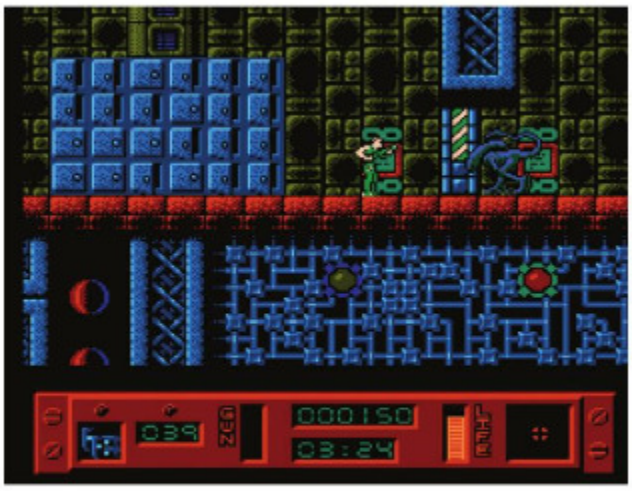
Year	1993
Publisher	LJN
Developer	Probe Software

THE THIRD ALIEN movie introduced an interesting concept: by placing its heroine Ellen Ripley on a prison planet and then adding an Alien to the mix, how would she and the prisoners be able to deal with the bloodthirsty xenomorph on a planet where all weapons are banned? Somewhere during the film's transition to video game form, someone clearly decided 'that won't really work here' and as such the Alien 3 game has Ripley armed to the teeth with pulse rifles, machine guns, flamethrowers and grenades.

FACT

The *Alien 3* movie is infamous for going through production hell. Director David Fincher felt he had no control over it and $7 million was spent on sets that were never used.

Whereas the SNES version of Alien 3 was its own bespoke game with a look and feel similar to Super Metroid, NES owners instead got a port of the more common version also available on the Mega Drive, Amiga, C64, Master System and Game Gear. Here Ripley has to make her way through a series of corridor-laden stages and

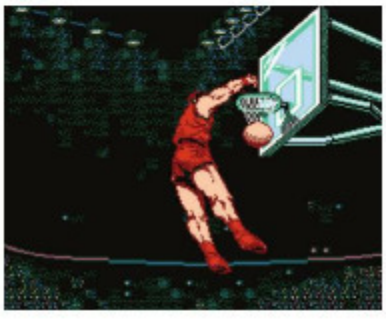


find all the trapped prisoners in each. If she fails to do this before the timer runs out chestbursters explode out of the prisoners, which is far from ideal (especially for the janitor, who'd presumably have to work overtime to clean up the mess).

Other versions of the game are notorious for having fast Aliens that suddenly run in from the side of the screen and kill the player. While the NES version is based on these other ones and has the same issue, it's actually a slightly more enjoyable experience because they appear less frequently, making for far fewer frustrating deaths. ■

ALL-PRO BASKETBALL

Year	1989
Publisher	Vic Tokai
Developer	Aicom



JAPANESE STUDIO AICOM'S attempt at a basketball game featured eight unofficially licensed teams – goodbye NY Knicks and LA Lakers, hello NY Slicks and LA Breakers – and the option for two players to take on a CPU opponent together. It featured a vertical view of the court, something that was fairly unique at a time when most basketball games offered a side-on view. This had its limitations, however: presumably to avoid the bottom basket getting in the way, every time the ball crossed the halfway line the action would freeze and the court would flip round, so the attacking team was always shooting upwards. Despite this, it was critically acclaimed, with impressive cut-scenes during dunks. ■

FACT

Japanese publisher Vic Tokai now deals in telecoms and is known as Tokai Communications. The 'Vic' stood for 'Valuable Information and Communication'.

ALPHA MISSION

Year	1987
Publisher	SNK
Developer	SNK

KNOWN AS ARMORED Scrum Object in Japan, Alpha Mission is an NES port of an SNK arcade shoot 'em up. It's interesting in that the player has two different types of shot: lasers for enemies flying towards you, and missiles for enemies based on the ground. It was also notoriously harsh with its power-ups, since of the 11 different types four of them are bad. Their effects range from sending you backwards and making you do certain areas again, to outright removing all your energy and power. This can make it an extremely difficult game for anyone who doesn't read the manual and just assumes, as in most shooters, that you're supposed to collect everything. ■

FACT

Alpha Mission got a sequel, the cleverly titled Alpha Mission II, which was released on SNK's Neo Geo hardware. It's currently available to download on the Nintendo Switch.

AMAGON

Year 1989
Publisher Sammy
Developer Aicom

AMAGON IS APPARENTLY 'the most decorated Marine' who was sent to a mysterious South Pacific island to investigate reports of monsters living there. After crash-landing on the island, Amagon realises his rescue ship is on the other side, so he has to fight his way through the monsters to reach it and leave the island in one piece. Thankfully, as a Marine, he obviously has the ability to transform into Megagon, a sort of super-strong version of his normal self. While Amagon didn't exactly set the gaming world alight, it did have one interesting idea: the strength of his Megagon form depended on how many points the player collected as Amagon. For every 5,000 points scored, Megagon could take an extra hit before dying. ■

FACT

It's a shame that Amagon wasn't released in the west under its Japanese title, which translates to Suddenly! Machoman.

AMERICAN GLADIATORS

Year 1991
Publisher GameTek
Developer Incredible Technologies

AMERICAN GLADIATORS – MUCH like the UK version that launched a few years later – was a TV game show where members of the public competed in a series of athletic events against the 'gladiators', a group of overpowered meatheads. This made it ripe for a video game tie-in, but rather than take the show's events and recreate them like-for-like, the NES version offered over-the-top 'video game style' versions. The one-on-one Joust event became a side-scrolling affair, while the Wall – in which contestants simply tried to climb a big wall – became a huge maze with numerous obstacles. The result was a game that ended up being far more entertaining than the more 'realistic' offerings on the Mega Drive and SNES in the following years. ■

FACT

In 1995 an *International Gladiators* series ran, bringing together Gladiators from the US, UK, Finnish and Russian versions of the show.

ANTICIPATION

Year 1988
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Rare

PROUDLY DECLARING ITSELF 'Nintendo's first video board game', Anticipation is Rare's take on what would happen if Pictionary and Trivial Pursuit had a digital baby. The board is based on the latter: players travel around and land on coloured categories with the aim being to answer one question of each colour. The questions, however, take the form of Pictionary-style puzzles in which the game slowly draws a picture and players have to 'buzz in' with their controller to guess what it is. Higher difficulty settings remove some of the guides (the clue, the number of letters and so on). It offers support for up to four players, but since it was released before the Four Score adapter, two players each share a controller. ■

FACT

Anticipation also borrows from Monopoly with its object-shaped tokens. Players can choose a pair of shoes, a teddy bear, a horn or an ice-cream cone.

ARCH RIVALS

Year 1990
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Midway

BEFORE NBA JAM, there was Arch Rivals. Dubbed 'a basket brawl' by developer Midway, it's very much the prototype that eventually became the more popular NBA Jam series. The game features two-on-two basketball with very few rules: rather than the non-contact sport it's supposed to be, players are instead completely free to punch their opponents to the ground with no penalties given as a result. The NES version of the game looks significantly poorer than the arcade version, and while it didn't have the game-breaking bug the Mega Drive version suffered from (where you could score 95 per cent of shots thrown regardless of where you were on the court), other glitches like three-point dunks still meant it was far from perfect. ■

FACT

The arcade version of Arch Rivals featured a move where you could grab a jumping player's shorts and pull them down, revealing their underwear.

ARCHON

Year 1989
Publisher Activision
Developer Bullet-Proof Software

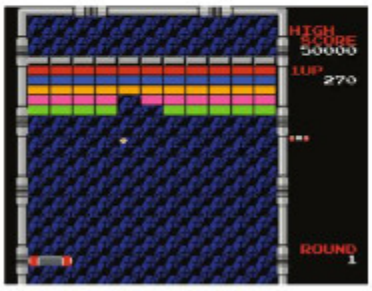
AN INTERESTING TAKE on chess where the player actually gets a chance to control the outcome when two pieces clash. Rather than Kings, Queens and Bishops, Archon deals instead with Banshees, Golems and Wizards, and as in chess each piece has their own rules for movement. The main difference, however, is that when you attempt to 'capture' an opposing piece, the action instead switches to an arena where the two characters involved have a fight which is fully controlled by the players. In this way you can potentially avoid your opponent's capture and take their piece out of action instead. This does, however, mean it's less about strategy and more about player skill during the battle scenes. ■

FACT

Archon was designed by Paul Reiche III, who went on to co-found Toys For Bob, the studio that developed the Skylanders games.

ARKANOID

Year 1987
Publisher Taito
Developer Taito



WHILE IT WAS Atari's Breakout that invented the brick-breaking genre, it was Arkanoid that built on its foundations to set the template for other imitators to follow. This was thanks to three major innovations: varied stages with different block layouts, enemies that got in the way and – most crucially – the addition of power-ups that dropped down and gave you different abilities. While the arcade version or Arkanoid was played with a knob that was turned to control the paddle's speed, this isn't possible with an NES controller's D-pad (even though the game supports it). As a result, the game was bundled with the Vaus controller, an analogue knob that gave you a similar level of control to the arcade game. ■

FACT

The game's final level pits you against DOH, a floating head which acts as the game's final boss. If you get Game Over here, you can't continue.

ARKISTA'S RING

Year 1990
Publisher Sammy
Developer Sammy

THE EVIL SHOGUN has stolen the magical ring that protects the city of Arkista (though obviously it doesn't protect it too well if it's able to be stolen), as well as the Elven Kingdom's treasured Wealth Amulet and Elf Mirror. A young elf named Christine decides to go and retrieve them, even though her fellow villagers tell her not to. Arkista's Ring bears many similarities to The Legend Of Zelda, and not just because people get confused and think its title is referring to the protagonist. It's a top-down adventure game with similar dungeons to Link's first adventure, and while it doesn't come close to matching Nintendo's game in terms of quality it does still have some interesting things going for it, like the ability to upgrade your bow and obtain magic wands that shoot fire. ■

FACT

The game's manual features a groanworthy joke, in which it states that the Cyclops enemy 'doesn't have a high eye-Q'.

ASTERIX

Year 1993
Publisher Infogrames
Developer Bit Managers

ASTERIX THE GAUL is upset. His super-strong pal Obelix has been kidnapped by the Romans – they carried him off while he was sleeping – and without its most powerful fighter the village is wide open for a Roman invasion. The village council sends Asterix off in search of him in a journey that takes in Gaul, Switzerland, Spain, Egypt and finally Rome, where Caesar plans to throw Obelix to the lions. Asterix was never released in North America, presumably because the character was far more popular in Europe. However, with its colourful and detailed graphics (right down to the trademark 'PAF!' sign when you hit an enemy), it's one of the better PAL region exclusives. ■

FACT

The *Asterix* series of comics and cartoons is so popular in Europe that when its native France launched its first satellite in 1965, they named it Asterix.

ASTYANAX

Year 1990
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Jaleco

ASTYANAX IS YOUR typical 'boy dreams about girl, girl is trapped in bubble, boy is transported to another dimension by a fairy and asked to save the girl who it turns out is actually a princess' story. Although Jaleco launched the NES version alongside an arcade game with the same name, the two are completely separate adventures with entirely different plots. Here, Astyanax is armed with an axe but can upgrade it to a spear and then a sword. He also has a selection of magic spells, letting him perform freezing, fire and thunder attacks on enemies. Occasionally he'll also encounter Cutie, the aforementioned fairy, who'll restore his magic or change his weapon. ■

FACT

The arcade version is instead about a man called Roche who's given a mythical fire axe by God and asked to save the world by killing a demon.

ATHENA

Year 1987
Publisher SNK
Developer Micronics

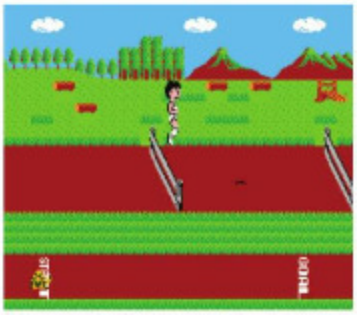
ATHENA IS THE Goddess of Wisdom, but despite this she's bored sitting in her castle, so she travels to the Fantasy World to fight some monsters, just to liven things up a bit. That's literally the plot of this port of SNK's action platformer, which hit arcades the previous year. Initially weaponless, Athena can collect eleven different weapons along the way, ranging from an iron ball and chain to a fire sword. Although the arcade version of Athena had its fans, the NES conversion was notorious for its extremely temperamental collision detection: sometimes you'll kill enemies when you're nowhere near them, and sometimes your weapon can pass right through them without incident. ■

FACT

The Japanese Famicom release of Athena came with a bright pink cassette tape featuring music from the game's arcade sequel, Psycho Soldier.

ATHLETIC WORLD

Year 1987
Publisher Bandai
Developer Bandai



THE FIRST OF ten games in Bandai's Family Trainer series, Athletic World was bundled with what was originally known as the Family Fun Fitness. This was a large floor mat that plugged into the NES controller port and let the player control the game with their feet, like an early version of arcade dance games.

Athletic World featured five different events – Hurdles, Hop a Log, Animal Trail, Rafting and Dark Tunnel – and each player got tailored advice based on their age and gender. Nintendo of America quickly set up a deal with Bandai to license the Family Fun Fitness, which was promptly pulled off the shelves, rebranded and released as the Nintendo Power Pad. ■

FACT

There are two types of Athletic World packaging: one with the Family Fun Fitness logo and one saying it's compatible with the Power Pad. The Family Fun Fitness one is much rarer.

ATTACK OF THE KILLER TOMATOES

Year 1991
Publisher THQ
Developer Imagineering

THE CULT 1978 movie *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* spawned a cartoon series which aired on Fox Kids in the early '90s. This game is based on the cartoon, and has young hero Chad Finletter trying to prevent the evil Dr Putrid T. Gangreen from activating his Doomsday Tomato device and 'pasting the city'. As far as cartoon tie-ins on the NES go, this is one of the most underrated: while it doesn't do anything massively revolutionary – jumping on enemies' heads is still the way to go – its impressive animation and music mean it's better than a lot of the lesser licensed fare on the system, and certainly better than the majority of THQ's other NES offerings. ■

FACT

The voice of Dr Gangreen in the cartoon was John Astin. If you've been paying attention reading this book, you'll already know he was Gomez in *The Addams Family*.

AUSSIE RULES FOOTY

Year 1991
Publisher Laser Beam Entertainment
Developer Beam Software

BY THE LATE 1980s, the Australian games market was dominated by the Sega Master System. Eager to get the NES back in the game, Mattel (who distributed the NES in Australia) got Melbourne-based Beam Software to make two Aussie-focused sports games: International Cricket and this, the first ever console game based on Australian rules football. It was quite a competent effort, too: despite not having the official AFL licence it featured solid controls, large chunky player sprites and even digitised umpire speech, a rarity on the NES. Granted, it only said one thing ('out of bounds, on the full') but it was better than nothing. Mattel's plan worked, as the game topped the charts in Australia. ■

FACT

There have been more than a dozen (official) AFL games since Aussie Rules Footy, the most recent being 2107's AFL Evolution on Xbox One, PS4 and Windows.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Year 1989
Publisher LJN
Developer Beam Software

NOTORIOUS FOR BEING one of the most frustrating games on the NES, Back to the Future is very loosely based on the hit 1985 movie of the same name. The majority of the game consists of controlling Marty McFly as he wanders through the streets of 1955 Hill Valley, collecting clocks to top up a constantly vanishing photo at the bottom of the screen (if it disappears, his future is erased). It's occasionally split up by basic mini-games where you throw milk shakes at bullies, catch you future mother's love hearts and collect musical notes. Its odd, frantic music was famously terrible, but it's actually a faithful rendition of the movie's theme song The Power Of Love sped up to a bizarre degree. ■

FACT

The movie's screenwriter Bob Gale was 'outraged' when LJN showed him the game. During media interviews, he told fans not to buy it.

BACK TO THE FUTURE PART II & III

Year 1990
Publisher LJN
Developer Beam Software

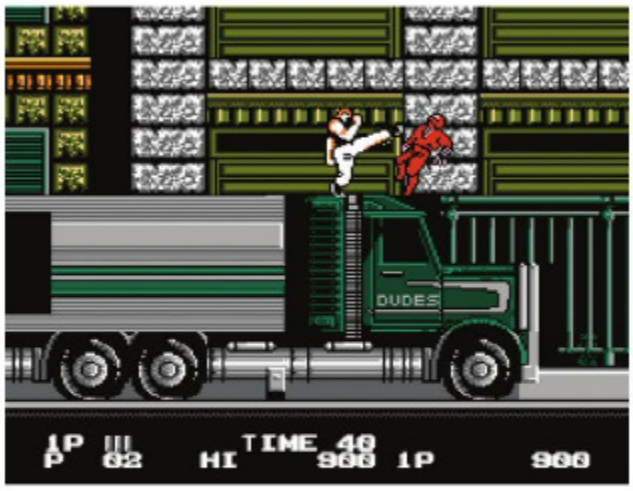
UNDETERRED BY THE negative reaction to the first Back to the Future game, LJN and Beam Software tried their hand at a follow-up. The second and third movies were shot back-to-back, so it was decided that the NES adaptation would follow suit and incorporate both plots into one game… sort of. The meat of the game is based on Back to the Future Part II, with Marty travelling between 1955, 1985 and 2015. It's more of a free-roaming affair than its predecessor: this time the player has to make their way through a series of interlinked 2D stages, with the aim being to find 30 important objects and return them to their correct time period. You do this by collecting keys and using them to open special doors which lead to 'object rooms'. Here you've got 60 seconds to collect all the clocks in the room, at which point the object will appear for collection. You then have to find a 'puzzle room', where you must unscramble the name of the object that's supposed to be placed there, then choose it from your inventory. It's as convoluted as it sounds and this, combined with the high difficulty level, meant most gamers never managed to reach the end of the Back to the Future Part II section. The few who did unlocked the Part III section, a far shorter remix of Part II with only 10 objects and no time travelling. ■

FACT

There are some interesting time-based mechanics in the game. If you plant an acorn in 1955, it'll be a tree in 1985 and 2015, letting you reach high platforms.

BAD DUDES

Year 1989
Publishers Data East / Ocean
Developer Data East



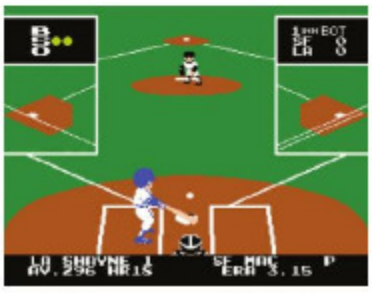
NO ALTERNATIVE PLOT summary would be as downright effective as the one that appears when you start playing Bad Dudes, so allow me to to quote the game directly: 'The president has been kidnapped by ninjas. Are you a bad enough dude to rescue the president!?' A very pertinent question, and one that's eventually answered as you fight your way through seven stages with such no-nonsense names as The City, The Sewer, The Forest and the final level, The Factory. The game itself is a side-scrolling 2D beat 'em up in which you can initially perform little more than jumps, punches and kicks while facing off against a series of oncoming ninja enemies from the evil Dragon Ninja clan. On occasion you'll pick up a nunchuk or knife, each of which gives you more powerful attacks. At the end of each stage you take on a tricky boss battle with one of the Dragon Ninja's 'super warriors'. Bad Dudes was popular enough to be namechecked in popular culture a couple of times, most notably in the Steve Martin film Parenthood ('well, they're bad dudes, that's why they call the game Bad Dudes') and Robocop. In the UK the game was published by Ocean Software and renamed Bad Dudes vs DragonNinja. This, combined with Sega's own ninja game Shinobi, was the inspiration for the name of Welsh rock band Lostprophets' 2001 debut single Shinobi vs Dragon Ninja. ■

FACT

In the original arcade version of Bad Dudes, the president was called President Ronnie and looked like Ronald Reagan. The NES president is unnamed and looks more like George H. W. Bush.

BAD NEWS BASEBALL

Year 1990
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo



NES GAMES WEREN'T in short supply when it came to baseball, and Bad News Baseball offered its own take on the sport. Originally released in Japan as Fierce Fighting!! Stadium, it's at least unique in that it's probably the only baseball game in which all the umpires are rabbits (for no given reason). Rather than offering a league system, the aim is instead to choose one of 12 teams and simply defeat the others one at a time until they're all beaten. There's also a hidden women's version of the game: if player 1 holds Down-Left on the controller and player 2 holds Up, resetting the game will replace all 12 male rosters with female ones. ■

FACT

When you beat the last team you get an ending in which your team celebrates. Part of this involves an obese shirtless fan carrying one player on his shoulders.

BAD STREET BRAWLER

Year 1989
Publisher Mattel
Developer Beam Software

DUKE DAVIS USED to be a punk rocker but has since become 'the world's coolest martial arts vigilante', determined to rid the streets of thuggery. He's armed with 15 different attacks – known as 'force moves' – but the player is only given three at a time, the ones you get depending on which level you're on. Bad Street Brawler was developed with the ill-fated Nintendo Power Glove controller in mind, making it a nightmare to control. This, combined with a bizarre range of enemies (its 'street thugs' include gorillas and small people swinging a ball and chain) and some strange dialogue ('never trouble trouble until trouble troubles you') have made it an infamous NES game, but not one many are in a rush to play. ■

FACT

Bad Street Brawler has numerous other names. The Commodore 64 version is called Bop 'N Rumble, while the Amiga port is brilliantly named Street Hassle.

BALLOON FIGHT

Year	1986
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D1

YOSHIO SAKAMOTO HAS worked at Nintendo for over 35 years. He's best known for being one of the co-creators of Metroid, but a couple of years before that he was handed his first major game design project, Balloon Fight. Teaming up with the late Satoru Iwata – working at HAL Laboratory at the time, but commissioned by Nintendo to program it – the pair created one of the most memorable NES games, one that continues to have a cult following to this day.

Balloon Fight consists of two different game types. The first, which is also found in the arcade version released two months prior, has players controlling a little chap with two helium balloons attached to him. By pressing the A button or holding down the B button, you can make him flap his arms: this makes him fly into the air. The aim is to defeat every enemy on the screen – each of whom are flying around on balloons of their own – by hitting them from above and popping their balloons, then floating over to them while they're grounded and knocking them off their platform into the water below.

The second mode, Balloon Trip, was programmed by Iwata in just three days and became a popular challenge for high score hunters. Here, the player starts on a platform on the right-hand side of the screen and starts flying to the left, dodging an endless series of spikes and collecting balloons along the way to build their score. Collecting 20 balloons in a row without missing any makes your balloons change colour, giving you more points. This adds a risk/reward element to proceedings and suddenly makes it about far more than just dodging the spikes, but also mastering your floating controls so you can swoop around and gracefully collect all the balloons without so much as a scratch.

FACT

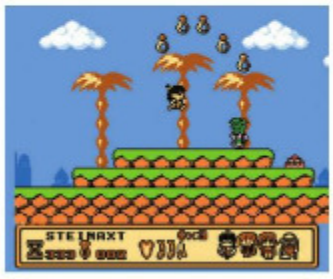
According to Sakamoto, Iwata knew the Balloon Fight code inside-out to such a degree that he could make changes to the game – something that would usually take hours – within seconds.

What makes Balloon Fight so compelling is this control system. The floaty movement can make accurate flying difficult at first, but it's something that can be mastered and the feeling when you do is so rewarding. In an interview, Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto explained that he borrowed this floating mechanic and used it as the foundation for the swimming controls in Super Mario Bros., with the A button 'bobbing' Mario up in the water in the same way it flaps the character upwards in Balloon Fight.

Balloon Fight continues to enjoy an active life to this day: it's one of the first games Nintendo releases every time it launches a Virtual Console service on a new system, and was recently included as one of the 30 built-in games on the NES Mini. As well as its numerous digital re-releases, a graphically enhanced spin-off called Tingle's Balloon Fight was released on the Nintendo DS in 2007. Made available exclusively in Japan through the Club Nintendo membership scheme, it replaces the standard Balloon Fight character with Tingle from the Zelda series and allows up to four players to play in co-op mode. ■

BANANA PRINCE

Year 1992
Publisher Takara
Developer KID



ALTHOUGH JAPANESE PUBLISHER Takara released a number of Famicom games in Japan, only two – Banana Prince and Over Horizon – made it to the NES, and both were only sold in Germany. Banana Prince is about a young islander who sets out to recover the island's special giant banana from the evil Paprika Dragon. While for the most part it's a competent yet standard platform game, it does have one interesting feature: by pressing Down and B, the Prince can plant a beanstalk wherever he wants. As well as climbing it to reach higher platforms, he can also do a special rolling jump off it: this not only goes further than a normal jump but also does damage to enemies, Sonic the Hedgehog style. ■

FACT

The Japanese version had shops with 'depart' written above the door, as shorthand for 'department store'. This was misinterpreted during the translation so the German version says 'adieu', French for 'goodbye'.

BANDAI GOLF: CHALLENGE PEBBLE BEACH

Year 1989
Publisher Bandai
Developer Tose

ONE OF THE first attempts to fully recreate a real-life golf course, Bandai Golf offers all 18 holes of the famous Pebble Beach Golf Links in California. Many of the elements of the real-life course are featured here: the hole layouts are relatively accurate and its infamous strong ocean winds are present and accounted for. While it's notable for letting the player choose their own handicap – something rarely seen in a golf game even today – its high level of difficulty and its inaccurate aiming mechanic mean it can be a frustrating game to master. There are better golf games on the NES, but Bandai Golf should at least get praise (well, maybe just a golf clap) for its attempt at authenticity. ■

FACT

The real-life Pebble Beach is one of the most expensive public golf courses in the world. A single round costs $525.

BANDIT KINGS OF ANCIENT CHINA

Year 1990
Publisher Koei
Developer Koei

THIS TURN-BASED STRATEGY game is based on the fourteenth century book *Water Margin*, one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature. It's set during the Song Dynasty, where Imperial Minister Gao Qiu has overthrown Emperor Huizong to become the new ruler. Under Gao Qiu's rule, 'good men are exiled while evil men are given power'. Playing as one of these exiled heroes, it's up to you to build and command an army of troops in an attempt to stop Gao Qiu and give him a swift kick up the backside. As its 58-page manual makes clear, this is not a simple game, but while its complex battles needed some time to get used to the game was well-received by those who stuck with it. ■

FACT

Although Gao Qiu is the main villain in both this game and the book it was based on, the real Gao Qiu was said to be loyal to Emperor Huizong.

BARBIE

Year 1991
Publisher Hi-Tech Expressions
Developer Imagineering

IN AN ATTEMPT to get more girls to play video games – this was over 25 years ago, remember – Hi Tech Expressions released this platformer based on the world's most popular doll. The entire game is set inside Barbie's dream, in which she searches for a ball gown, pearl ring and high heels to wear to the Fantasy Ball. While games aimed at girls have mostly been patronising and shoddy over the years, Barbie is far from the worst offender. Despite having one of the largest player sprites you'll ever see in a game, it's actually an acceptable enough platformer, even if its bosses are a bit odd. This is the only game where you'll face off against a floating jersey that throws shoes at you. ■

FACT

The first of the game's three main worlds is called Mall World, because of course it is.

THE BARD'S TALE: TALES OF THE UNKNOWN

Year 1991
Publisher FCI
Developer Interplay

THE ONCE PROSPEROUS town of Skara Brae has been transformed by the evil sorcerer Mangar into 'a world of winter', with monsters lurking around every corner. Most townsfolk have abandoned Skara Brae, but six brave villagers have decided to fight by rescuing the imprisoned wizard Kylearan and enlisting his help to kill Mangar. The Bard's Tale is a 'dungeon crawl' game much like many RPGs of the time, in which the player makes their way through a series of maze-like dungeons while taking part in random battles and levelling up. The problem is, it was originally released in 1985, meaning by the time it was ported to the NES six years later it was considered primitive by RPG standards. ■

FACT

The Bard's Tale spawned seven sequels and spin-offs over the years. The latest game, The Bard's Tale IV: Barrows Deep, was released in 2018.

BARKER BILL'S TRICK SHOOTING

Year 1990
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1

ONE OF THE best games designed for the Zapper light gun, this was based on Barker Bill's Cartoon Show, a TV programme that aired in the US in the 1950s. It consists of four different mini-games. In Balloon Saloon, players have to shoot balloons as they float away. In Flying Saucers, they must shoot plates being thrown across the screen by Barker Bill and his assistant Trixie. Window Pains has players shooting through open windows to hit the falling objects behind them, while Fun Follies mixes all three and throws in occasional bonus stages where you shoot coins, eggs and tomatoes. Given the age of the show it was based on, many young gamers mistook Barker Bill for Mario. ■

FACT

The Balloon Saloon mini-game features a cameo by the dog from Duck Hunt. He pops up from time to time and you have to avoid shooting him.

BASE WARS

Year 1991
Publisher Ultra Games
Developer Konami

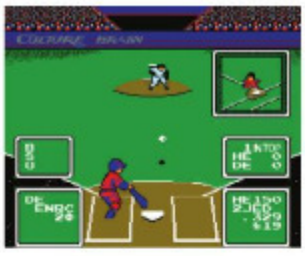
KONAMI'S WAY OF standing out in the sea of NES baseball games was a baseball game where all the players are robots. Robots that fight each other. There are four types in the game – cyborgs, tanks, flybots and motorcycles – and any time there's a close force-out or put-out, rather than the game simply deciding whether the runner was safe or out, the action switches to a fight where the winner gets the call in their favour. Each robot has a set number of hit points, and if a robot loses all its points in fights it'll explode. If three robots on a team explode, that team loses by default. This means you can focus on fighting and can win without even playing any baseball. ■

FACT

This was the first and last game in Konami's Cyber Stadium Series, so anyone hoping for a robot badminton game should stop waiting.

BASEBALL SIMULATOR 1.000

Year 1990
Publisher Culture Brain
Developer Culture Brain



TOKYO STUDIO CULTURE Brain's take on baseball included twelve 'normal' teams and six 'Ultra League' teams. The Ultra League teams have the ability to perform Ultra Plays, a series of 25 special moves that can change the course of the game. For example, pitchers can throw a Phantom Ball (which disappears) or an Iron Ball, while batters can pull off a Meteor Hit, which causes their bat to shatter into fragments that knock out fielders and stop them catching the ball. As well as the Ultra Play mechanic, the game also has a full edit suite which lets players edit the team and player names, stats and Ultra Plays (if applicable) for any of the 18 teams. ■

FACT

Baseball Simulator 1.000 was popular enough to spawn no fewer than five SNES sequels, only one of which made it outside of Japan.

BASEBALL

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1

IT STANDS TO reason that the first baseball game released on the NES was one made by Nintendo itself. Because of its age – it originally launched in 1983, just a few months after the Famicom hit Japan – it's also one of the most basic baseball games on the system, though it's still fun to play. With only six teams to choose from and basic pitching and batting controls, it takes barely any time to get used to, meaning entertaining two-player matches can be had almost right off the bat (pun always intended).

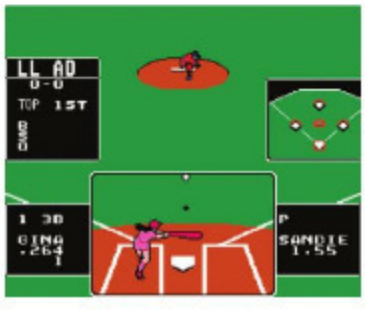
Baseball is perhaps more important for what it meant to Nintendo than its qualities as a baseball game. As one of the 18 games that released alongside the NES when Nintendo ran its test launch in Manhattan, Baseball was one of the key games in establishing Nintendo's new system and convincing a general public losing interest in the video game fad that this wasn't another Atari imitator. Vice President of Brand Management Gail Tilden spent the holiday season of 1985 travelling to various New York and New Jersey malls, accompanied by New York Mets players like Mookie Wilson and Ron Darling, where she set up large screens and had the players compete against shoppers at Baseball. By showing customers what was (at the time) by far the best electronic rendition of their national sport, Nintendo secured a lot of early adopters and helped ensure the NES got off to a good start in the west. ■

FACT

The character and game design for Baseball were led by none other than Shigeru Miyamoto, who 'personally really wanted there to be a baseball game' on the Famicom.

BASEBALL STARS

Year 1989
Publisher SNK
Developer SNK



ANOTHER BASEBALL GAME, another interesting gimmick. SNK's Baseball Stars introduces a sort of RPG element to proceedings: the better you play the more money you earn, and this money can then be spent to upgrade players' stats or buy new ones for your roster (even female players). This aside, Baseball Stars packs a number of other firsts: as well as being the first sports game with a battery back-up (letting you save onto the cartridge instead of using a password), it was also the first to let players create new teams and players on top of the eight pre-existing ones. Meanwhile, though it doesn't have officially licensed players, one team has a suspiciously familiar roster including 'Babe' (Ruth), 'Hank' (Aaron) and 'Willie' (Mays). ■

FACT

The highest possible score in the game is 1858–1854. This is because the game ends immediately if a team is leading by 100 runs after a half-inning, or 10 after an inning.

BASEBALL STARS 2

Year 1992
Publisher Romstar
Developer SNK

BASEBALL STARS WAS a big success in America and Canada, and so a few years later SNK released a sequel in the arcades. By this time SNK was focused on its own Neo-Geo console, so while an NES port was still developed, publishing duties were instead taken over by Californian company Romstar. Unfortunately, despite being a sequel, Baseball Stars 2 isn't known for what it added to the original, but what it removed. Female players were no longer in the game, and the ability to create and edit custom teams and players was also no more. Add to this the fact that the RPG system was more of a grind than before (upgrades cost far more money) and the result was a disappointing follow-up. ■

FACT

Despite its name, this is actually the third Baseball Stars game. The second, Baseball Stars Professional, was only released on arcades and Neo-Geo.

BASES LOADED

Year 1988
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Tose

DESPITE BEING ONE of the earlier baseball games on the NES, Bases Loaded was packed with features that were considered somewhat ahead of their time. Players can take on a 132-game season – with a password given after each game – which was a rarity in '80s sports games, while occasional voice clips and Jumbotron shots (where little animations played out on the big screen) add to the atmosphere. The only truly divisive feature is, however, the most important: rather than the usual 'behind the batter' viewpoint most baseball games had, Bases Loaded instead places the camera behind the pitcher. While this makes the game look a lot more like a TV broadcast, it makes batting significantly trickier. ■

FACT

Each team in Bases Loaded has a specific batter who will 'charge the mound' and try to fight the pitcher if you hit him with the ball.

BASES LOADED II: SECOND SEASON

Year 1990
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Tose

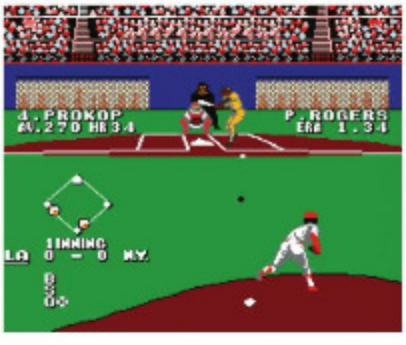
THE SECOND BASES Loaded game adds a couple of new features to keep things fresh for fans of the original. The season mode is now 130 games long, but ends with a World Series match against either LA or New York (depending on what league your team is from). The ability to choose your starting lineup for each match has been added, along with player form: players 'go through streaks and slumps like real major leaguers,' according to the manual. The fictional rosters have completely changed too: now all the Washington players are named after politicians (Nixon, Regan, Bush etc.) while the Los Angeles squad shares its name with Hollywood stars (Cruise, Pacino, Astaire). ■

FACT

Bases Loaded II got a novelisation in the early '90s as part of Worlds Of Power, a nine-book series of stories from video games like Metal Gear and Mega Man 2.

BASES LOADED 3

Year 1991
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Tose



SOMETIMES WHEN YOU try to shake things up a bit you can annoy a lot of fans. This was the case with Bases Loaded 3, which completely axed the popular 130-game season mode and replaced it with a single challenge: play a perfect game. As well as the normal score you also start with a rating of 100, and every time you make a mistake – throw to an unmanned base, strike out, etc. – points are deducted. The aim, then, is to not only beat your CPU opponent but also try and keep a rating of 100 by the end. While it was a novel idea, fans hated the scrapping of the season mode and Bases Loaded 3 was criticised as a result. ■

FACT

The cover star was Chicago Cubs second baseman Ryne Sandberg, even though the lack of a licence meant neither he nor any other MLB player was actually in the game.

BASES LOADED 4

Year 1993
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Tose

ITS LESSON WELL and truly learned, Jaleco ditched its 'perfect game' gimmick and brought back the season mode for its final NES Bases Loaded game. Once again players are able to play through a 130-game season culminating in a 'Super Series' final, and once again the starting line-up can be changed at will. One new feature does make its debut, though, in the form of the star system. As players make great plays and mess up they'll get white and black stars assigned to their name: these affect performance and so the player has to decide whether to bench players who are on a slump, or try to build their form up again. A happy ending for the series on the NES. ■

FACT

The Bases Loaded games were part of a series of sports games called Moreo!! in Japan. Other entries made it to the west as Goal!, Hoops and Racket Attack.

BATMAN

Year 1990
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft

TIM BURTON'S 1989 *Batman* movie was such a box office smash that it led to a number of video game adaptations. While Ocean Software got the rights to make Batman games for home computers like the Amiga, ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64, the console rights instead went to Japanese studio Sunsoft, who got to work making completely different games for the NES, Game Boy, Mega Drive and PC Engine (TurboGrafx-16). The NES rendition, thought by many to be the best of the bunch, is an action platformer in which Batman makes his way through five difficult levels in order to reach the Joker for a showdown atop Gotham Cathedral's bell tower. While this matches the final battle in the movie, the rest of the game bears little resemblance to Burton's film, as Batman takes on a series of obscure DC Comics villains like Killer Moth, the Electrocutioner and Firebug. This didn't appear to bother players too much, as the game was was well received for its difficult but satisfying gameplay.

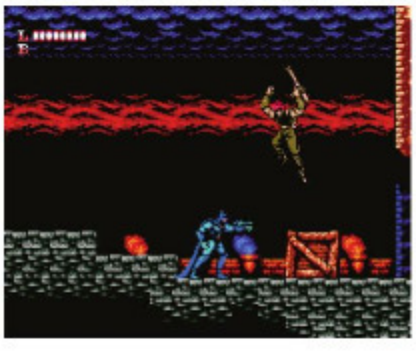
Armed with a trio of weapons – the Batarang, the Spear Gun and the Dirk (a gun that shoots in three directions) – and able to do wall-jumps as in Ninja Gaiden, Batman is a versatile hero to play as and the game is a treat to play as a result. It may not match the film beat-for-beat, but Batman still goes down as one of the rare early examples of a licensed movie tie-in that wasn't a half-hearted cash-in. ■

FACT

Other DC Comics villains who appear as standard enemies in the game include KGBeast, Deadshot and Maxie Zeus.

BATMAN: RETURN OF THE JOKER

Year 1991
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft



SUNSOFT'S SECOND NES Batman game didn't have a film behind it, so instead it looked more like the comic book versions of Batman in the early '90s. In case the title didn't make it obvious, Return of the Joker has the Joker escaping from Arkham Asylum and stealing a bunch of precious metals from Gotham's mines. He plans to use these metals to make explosives, so it's up to Batman to punch him in the head a bit. With larger sprites than its predecessor, Return of the Joker has more of a focus on shooting than hand-to-hand combat, and plays a little more like a Batman version of Mega Man instead. Which is obviously no bad thing at all. ■

FACT

This was later remade for the Mega Drive as Batman: Revenge of the Joker. Speaking of title changes, the NES version is known as Dynamite Batman in Japan.

BATMAN RETURNS

Year 1993
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

BY THE TIME the second Batman movie came around the Batman licence was no longer in Sunsoft's hands, with Konami having taken the reins. Its NES adaptation of Batman Returns was a side-scrolling beat 'em up similar to Double Dragon, in which Batman punches his way through six stages in an attempt to destroy the Catwoman and the Penguin. In order to keep things interesting, the game features special racing stages where the player controls the Batmobile and the Batskiboat. While Batman only has one life bar, the game does let you continue: however, you don't get the 'true' ending (in which a penguin praises you, for some reason) unless you beat the game within a certain time without dying. ■

FACT

The game's oddest power-up is a test tube. It can only be used once: when you fight Catwoman, it's used automatically and halves her health.

BATTLE CHESS

Year 1990
Publisher Data East
Developer Beam Software

A PORT OF Interplay's novel take on chess. Instead of the traditional chess pieces, each unit on the board is an actual living character that walks when you make a move (the rook turns into a large stone monster). The main feature, however, is that when the player captures a piece, the game switches to a cutscene, set in a courtyard, in which the two characters battle each other until yours wins in an inventive way. Limbs are dismembered, heads are smashed and aforementioned stone monsters are kicked in the groin. While it's a novel way of playing chess, many criticised it for being extremely slow, with animations that take an age to finish. ■

FACT

Battle Chess spawned two non-NES sequels. Battle Chess II was based on Chinese chess, while Battle Chess 4000 was set in space.

THE BATTLE OF OLYMPUS

Year 1989
Publisher Broderbund / Nintendo
Developer Infinity

MANY GAMES OVER the years have been inspired by The Legend of Zelda, but few have borrowed specifically from Zelda II. The Battle of Olympus does just that, offering similar side-scrolling action gameplay to Link's second adventure. The story here is set not in Hyrule, though, but ancient Greece: a young chap called Orpheus has to rescue his girlfriend Helene from Hades, the god of the dark world Tartarus. He does this by travelling through eight lands in search of the gods, each of whom gives him a new weapon or upgrade. For example, Argus gives you the power to fire shots from your sword, while Poseidon gives you an Ocarina. So in a way, maybe it influenced Zelda too. ■

FACT

In Greek mythology, Orpheus was a musician, poet and prophet who could charm all living things with his music. It's said he died when a group of women tore him to pieces.

BATTLE TANK

Year 1990
Publisher Absolute Entertainment
Developer Imagineering

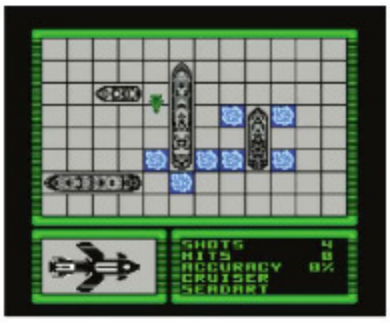
BACK IN 1980 Atari wowed arcade-goers with Battlezone, a 3D vector game in which the player controlled a tank and shot at enemies from a first-person perspective. Ten years later, veteran designer Garry Kitchen created Battle Tank, an NES game that borrows so much from Battlezone that it might as well be considered a spiritual successor. Players are put behind the controls of an M1 Abrams tank, and the aim is to blow up everything – enemy tanks, choppers, nuclear power bases, fuel tanks and the like – in an attempt to find and rescue a NATO Commanding Officer who's being held hostage by the unnamed 'enemy'. While Battlezone's influence is clear, Battle Tank improves on it by giving your tank a variety of weapons, including a smokescreen, cannon and machine gun. ■

FACT

Garry Kitchen was better known for creating Keystone Kapers and developing A Boy And His Blob alongside its creator David Crane.

BATTLESHIP

Year 1993
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Mindscape UK



VIDEO GAME VERSIONS of board games are always an interesting concept, because they usually have to be able to offer something extra to justify not just buying the real thing. Battleship attempts to do this by including a 40-level single player mode, in which the player has to destroy the CPU's ships. There are also different 'weapons' which take the game beyond the traditional method of picking a single square and hoping it hits. Missiles, for example, can destroy an entire ship with just one hit. Perhaps the biggest blunder with Battleship, however, is the fact that it sorely lacks a multiplayer mode of any kind: it's a random game at the best of times but playing just the CPU is even less satisfying. ■

FACT

One of the 'tips' in the manual is to 'reset if it looks too bad', essentially teaching children that rage-quitting is okay.

BATTLETOADS

Year 1991
Publisher Tradewest
Developer Rare

WHEN THE FIRST Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles craze kicked off in the early '90s, a number of other 'cool mutant animal gang' franchises were created to capitalise on it. Alongside the likes of Biker Mice From Mars and Street Sharks came the Battletoads, created by Rare co-founders Tim and Chris Stamper. Zitz, Rash and Pimple are a trio of adventurous amphibians who were designed to be the video game equivalent of the Turtles, with this NES game serving as their official introduction. In it, Zitz and Rash have to fight their way through a series of stages in order to rescue Pimple and their friend Princess Angelica from the evil Dark Queen. While most of these stages consist of standard side-scrolling beat 'em up gameplay in the style of Double Dragon, there are a few other types of level scattered throughout including one in which the Battletoads descend a chasm on a rope, and one where they climb a tower (complete with some impressive 3D rotation trickery). The most infamous level, however, is Turbo Tunnel, in which players ride a speeder bike and have to dodge a series of increasingly fast obstacles.

FACT

A pilot episode for a Battletoads cartoon aired in the US on Thanksgiving in 1992. It was never picked up for a full series.

While Battletoads obviously didn't reach the heady heights of the Turtles, the NES original gained a reputation as a notoriously difficult game: the Turbo Tunnel stage is just the first in a series of infuriatingly tricky ones, and as such to this day completing Battletoads is considered a badge of honour among gamers. ■

BATTLETOADS & DOUBLE DRAGON

Year 1993
Publisher Tradewest
Developer Rare

YOU KNOW HOW I said Battletoads' beat 'em up sections played a bit like Technos' classic arcade and NES title Double Dragon? Obviously somebody at Tradewest or Rare thought the same, hence this crossover game. As well as all three Battletoads – the now-rescued Pimple is available for duty this time – players can now also choose to play as Billy or Jimmy Lee from Double Dragon. What's the occasion? Well, the five are trying to prevent the newly-formed partnership of the Dark Queen and Double Dragon's Shadow Warriors gang from taking over the world with the Colossus, a new battleship that's emerged from the moon. Technos had very little involvement in the development of this game beyond licensing out its characters: as such, the game plays more like Battletoads than Double Dragon, albeit without the former's extreme difficulty level. The number of non-combat 'gimmick' stages has dropped to two and they're far easier to manage: although the speeder bikes return, their stage is much easier to complete this time around, and a new shoot 'em up section is also less stressful than it could have been. While the game is still no cakewalk, players are far more likely to beat this one than its predecessor because the combat, while full-on, offers far fewer 'cheap' deaths. Although Battletoads is the more well-known game, it could be argued that this is the better one, with its greater emphasis on combat and some truly impressive pseudo-3D scrolling effects. ■

FACT

The screenwriter for the Battletoads cartoon pilot was TMNT writer David Wise. By sheer coincidence, a different David Wise at Rare composed the music for the Battletoads games.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Year 1994
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Probe Software

ALTHOUGH PLANNED FOR a North American release, the NES's gradual demise in the wake of the SNES's release meant Hudson Soft's take on Disney's award-winning animated movie only made it as far as France and Germany. Controlling the Beast, players have to make their way through a series of platforming stages before defeating Gaston in order to win the love of Belle and turn human. One stage breaks from the normal platforming routine by having you catch snowballs thrown at you by Belle, but for the most part it's normal running and jumping fare. One novel element is the game's timer, which is represented by the iconic flower from the film: when all the petals run out your time's up and the game is over. ■

FACT

Hudson Soft also released a SNES version of Beauty and the Beast. While the concept is the same (right down to the snowball level), it's a separate game with different stages.

BEETLEJUICE

Year 1991
Publisher LJN
Developer Rare

BASED ON THE film released three years prior, Beetlejuice has you playing as the titular spectre as you try to scare the Deetz family out of the home they've just moved into. Although it, like many other movie tie-ins, is a standard platform game for the most part, it does have a unique 'scare' system. Every time you kill an enemy you're given 'help vouchers': these can be taken to a Recently Deceased Information Booth and traded in for different types of scares. These can then be triggered to help defeat enemies and bosses. In keeping with the film's 'say his name three times' gimmick, each time you take a hit the word 'Beetlejuice' appears on-screen, with the third time killing him. ■

FACT

The manual describes one of the scares as 'Birdman'. Michael Keaton, who played Beetlejuice, went on to star in a film called Birdman in 2014.

BEST OF THE BEST: CHAMPIONSHIP KARATE

Year 1992
Publisher Electro Brain / Loricel
Developer Movie Software

ORIGINALLY RELEASED IN Europe as Panza Kick Boxing, Best of the Best was ported to consoles a couple of years later. It's a 'serious' martial arts fighting game, in that button-mashing or Street Fighter style play doesn't work. Instead, the controls are deliberately complicated in order to make even striking your opponent an achievement. This gives the game an enormous difficulty curve, but once players take the time to learn and master its attacks the result is a surprisingly deep fighter with impressive animations. Despite obviously looking less detailed than it does on other systems, the NES port isn't a bad effort considering it was coded by 'Movie Software', which in reality was one French chap called Carlo Perconti. ■

FACT

Once you win the belt you're asked to defend it at the Kumate, a no-holds-barred fighting tournament with no referee and no time limits.

BIGFOOT

Year 1990
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Beam Software

NOT BASED ON the mythical beast of American folklore, but the famous monster trucks that have been wowing petrolheads since the 1970s. The player controls Bigfoot in a series of events against other cars: most of these are normal races played from a top-down perspective, but sometimes you'll have to do special events – hill climbs, tractor pulls, car crushing and mud races – all of which are played with a side-on viewpoint. Unusually for a racer, these side-on sections play more like athletics games, with the player waggling the D-pad left and right to build up speed and get through the obstacle in question. This all culminates in a 'New York Drag Race', featuring every type of obstacle. ■

FACT

There have actually been 24 different Bigfoot trucks over the years, including 1985's Ms Bigfoot, the first to be driven by a woman.

BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT VIDEO GAME ADVENTURE

Year 1991
Publisher LJN
Developer Rocket Science Games

THIS NES TAKE on the popular 1989 Keanu Reeves movie doesn't follow the same plot, but instead acts as a follow-up story in which Bill and Ted are once again summoned to save history. Some 'evil future rebels' have gone into the past, taken some famous names from history and moved them to completely different time periods. Our heroes have to find the likes of Al Capone, Elvis and Robin Hood and return them to their original eras before time runs out, otherwise they'll miss their big concert and their band Wyld Stallyns will never become famous. While the idea is sound, the game's unpredictability – sometimes you can walk on grass and talk to people, sometimes they get you stuck and hurt respectively – make it frustrating. ■

FACT

Each historical figure has to be befriended by giving them an item related to them. Rather darkly, the item for Elvis is his own gravestone.

BILL ELLIOTT'S NASCAR CHALLENGE

Year 1991
Publisher Konami
Developer Distinctive Software

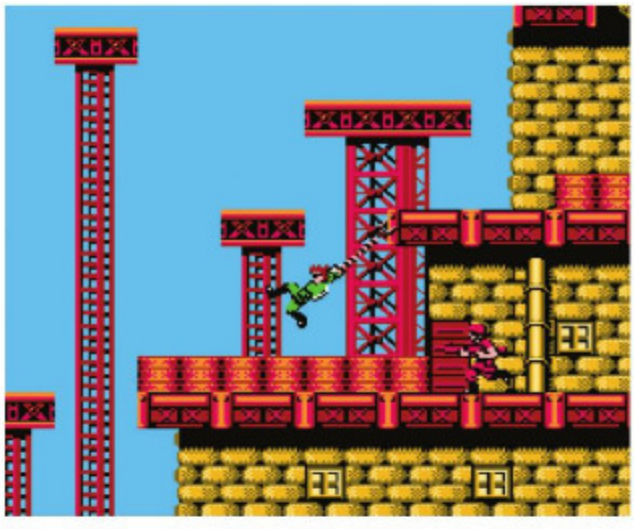
TECHNICAL LIMITATIONS OF the NES era meant it was fairly uncommon for racing games to be played from an in-car perspective, but Konami's racer – featuring licenses with both NASCAR and 16-time NASCAR Most Popular Driver Bill Elliott – managed just that. It features four tracks – two ovals (Daytona and Talladega) and two road tracks (Watkins Glen and Sears Point) – and includes an eight-race Championship mode where you visit each course twice in an attempt to finish top of the points leaderboard ahead of Elliott himself and 14 other fictional drivers. Although visually impressive for an NES racer, the detailed pseudo-3D viewpoint comes at a price: the sensation of speed is drastically lacking, meaning racing at 185mph feels surprisingly sedate. ■

FACT

Being the cover star has its perks: if you don't finish first in a race in this game, the CPU-controlled Bill Elliott is almost always the winner.

BIONIC COMMANDO

Year 1988
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom



A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT adventure to its arcade game of the same name, Capcom's arcade platformer is considered one of the most memorable third-party NES titles. Players take control of Ladd Spencer, a commando fitted with a mechanical arm which he can use as a grappling gun. Spencer's mission is to infiltrate the evil Empire and rescue top commando Super Joe, while trying to put a stop to the Empire's leader, who plans to finish an evil scheme hatched by a former group called the Badds (referred to in the manual as the Nazz). As you may suspect by the latter name, these are supposed to be Nazis, and actually are in the Japanese version (which is known as Hitler's Revenge: Top Secret), but Nintendo of America's strict family-friendly policy forced them to be changed to something a little less obvious. The game itself is an action platformer, with the twist being that while your hero can fire all manner of weaponry, he can't actually jump. Instead, he must use his mechanical arm to grapple onto ledges and swing across them to reach other platforms. This grappling and swinging mechanic was unique at the time and led to many hailing Bionic Commando as an instant classic. It's clear Capcom is proud of it too, as Spencer (now known as Rad Spencer or Nathan Spencer depending on the game) has appeared in recent times as a playable fighter in its Marvel vs Capcom fighting games. ■

FACT

Super Joe, the chap you're trying to rescue in Bionic Commando, was actually the hero in one of Capcom's earlier games, simply called Commando.

THE BLACK BASS

Year	1989
Publisher	HOT-B
Developer	Another

CONGRATULATIONS, YOU'RE ONE of 200 people who have been invited to participate in the oddly generic sounding Black Bass Fishing Tournament. The tournament is set over four different lakes and takes place from 6.00am to sunset, and in order to proceed to the next stage you have to, quite simply, catch a load of fish. While you can catch a variety of fish including trout and pike, since this is The Black Bass only the titular species will count towards your total haul. The game is mostly played from a top-down perspective, making it easier to see your lure as you move it around and try to hook your fish. Lures, weather and the time of day affect how likely you are to catch a bass. ■

FACT

Although the game's box and manual call it The Black Bass, the game's title screen instead says 'The Black Bass USA'.

BLADES OF STEEL

Year	1988
Publisher	Konami
Developer	Konami

KONAMI'S ICE HOCKEY game was originally an arcade title, and it keeps its fast-paced action in the jump over to the NES. There are eight teams – four from Canada and four from the US – and players can take part in either a standard exhibition match or a tournament mode, which puts all eight teams in a quarter finals style knockout bracket. The game is notable for its shooting system (in which an arrow moves up and down the goal, requiring timing to shoot the puck where you want it to go) and its fighting, where the action switches to a side-on view much like a fighting game. Unlike in the NHL, the loser of a fight is punished with a two-minute penalty. ■

FACT

At the end of the second period the game switches to the scoreboard, where you can play a mini-game based on Konami's shooter Gradius.

BLASTER MASTER

Year	1988
Publisher	Sunsoft
Developer	Sunsoft

A YOUNG LAD named Jason loses his pet frog Fred after it jumps down a hole. Chasing after it, Jason discovers a tank called Sophia the 3rd, designed to destroy the hordes of radioactive mutants that happen to be living under the Earth's crust. It's up to Jason to make his way through these mutants and ultimately defeat their leader the Plutonium Boss, in order to find and recover his beloved pet frog.

Blaster Master holds up as one of the better third-party NES action games, and features two distinct game styles: at times you'll be riding inside Sophia in 2D side-scrolling platforming sections, but sometimes you'll have to leave her and enter a cave, at which point the game switches to Zelda-style top-down maze exploration. ■

FACT

A brilliant remake of Blaster Master, entitled Blaster Master Zero, was released on the 3DS and Switch in 2017.

THE BLUE MARLIN

Year	1992
Publisher	HOT-B
Developer	HOT-B

THE SEQUEL TO The Black Bass once again has you taking part in a fishing tournament, but this time instead of bass you're catching billfish: marlin, swordfish, sailfish and the like. Rather than simply swapping out the types of fish from the previous game, The Blue Marlin instead completely changes the fish-catching process. Now players have to cruise their boat across the water, trying to trawl for fish. When you hook one, the catching screen is now a more dynamic viewpoint than its predecessor's top-down perspective. It also throws up occasional multiple choice dilemmas, like your gloves starting to smoke or a marlin trying to cut your propellor line, which force you to decide quickly what action to take. ■

FACT

You can level up your character this time, building their muscle power, body strength and skill to make it easier to catch bigger fish.

THE BLUES BROTHERS

Year 1992
Publisher Titus
Developer Titus

A 2D PLATFORMER based on the comedy movie and *Saturday Night Live* skits starring John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd. Seemingly following on from the events of the film, the brothers are 'back in town' (despite having been jailed in the movie) and plan to put on the world's greatest rock 'n roll concert.

However, the local law enforcement still aren't happy with the chaos they caused last time and so the sheriff has shut down all roads to the stage, meaning the pair have to take an alternative route via a mall, warehouse, prison, sewer and abandoned building site. Given the buddy nature of the movie, the game can be played in co-op with two players, but the screen only focuses on the first player. ■

FACT

The game's soundtrack consists of 8-bit versions of songs from the movie, including *Everybody Needs Somebody*.

BO JACKSON BASEBALL

Year 1991
Publisher Data East
Developer Beam Software

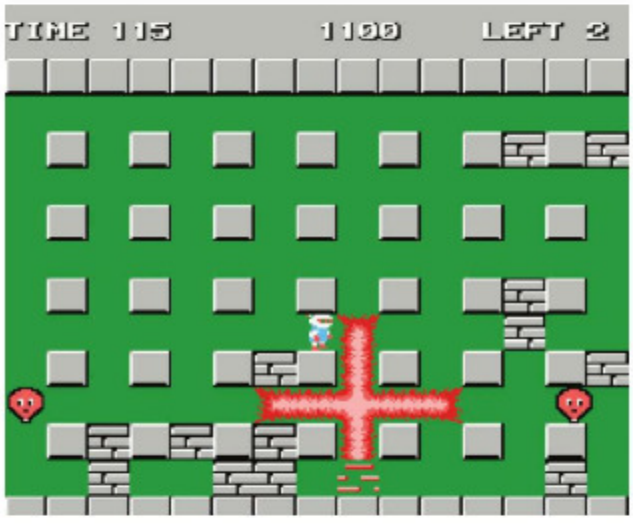
ANOTHER IN THE long line of baseball games released for the NES, and one that doesn't do much to stand out other than a few presentational quirks. The star of the show is obviously Mr Jackson, one of the greatest multi-sport athletes of all time (he's better known among NES gamers, not for his baseball ability, but as the best player in American football title Tecmo Bowl). While the actual gameplay is similar to that seen in other baseball games of its era, its cut-scenes – including players squaring up to the umpire and a singer giving a full rendition of the national anthem – gave it more of a personality. Oddly, a cheat code lets you play as an All-Bo Team, in which every player is Bo Jackson. ■

FACT

Although the NES version was never released in Europe, it did make it to the Amiga there under the name TV Sports Baseball.

BOMBERMAN

Year 1989
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft



HUDSON SOFT'S ICONIC bomb-dropping franchise didn't actually start on Nintendo – having been released on Japanese home computers first – but it was on the NES that the series properly took off. Despite Bomberman being well-known nowadays as one of the finest multiplayer experiences in gaming, the first NES game was a strictly solo affair consisting of 50 single-player levels. In each, the aim is to blow up all the enemies with your bombs, at which point you'll be able to exit to the next stage. Your bombs' explosions shoot out vertically and horizontally, so the trick is timing your bomb drops so they detonate just as an enemy walks past and hits the flame.

This first Bomberman game had a storyline which has been forgotten over the years: Bomberman is actually a robot built by an evil corporation to make bombs in an underground lab, and one day he hears a rumour that if he can make it to the surface he'll turn human. In an interesting twist, when you beat the game he does indeed turn into a human, at which point it's revealed that he's actually the star of Lode Runner, a game Hudson Soft released a year prior. The need for sequels means this story has since been brushed under the carpet, and now Bomberman and his friends have no corporate weapons-manufacturing past, and have always been heroic arsonists only ever interesting in blowing things up for the sake of all that is good. ■

FACT

Before it made it to the NES, a port of Bomberman was released for the ZX Spectrum in Europe. Bizarrely, it was renamed Eric and the Floaters.

BOMBERMAN II

Year 1991
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

THE SECOND BOMBERMAN game was also the first to be released on the NES in Europe (where it was known as Dynablaster). The single-player mode is similar to that of its predecessor, albeit with a new story: this time Bomberman's been wrongly jailed for a bank heist his evil twin committed, so he has to blast his way out. Bomberman II is most notable, however, for being the first game in the series to feature its iconic multiplayer mode. Up to three players (using a Four Score multitap) can take part in head-to-head deathmatches where blasting your friends is the order of the day. The multiplayer mode was so well-received that it became a Bomberman staple from that point on. ■

FACT

The Sega Saturn version of Bomberman included a ridiculous 10-player mode, complete with cameo characters from the likes of Adventure Island and Bonk.

BONK'S ADVENTURE

Year 1994
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Red Company

BONK WAS ORIGINALLY created as a comic character for a Japanese magazine based on the PC Engine (the Japanese name for NEC's TurboGrafx-16 console). Bonk's Adventure, then, was originally a TurboGrafx exclusive, with Bonk considered NEC's mascot. When NEC decided to pull out of the console market, Hudson Soft was allowed to port the game over to other systems, meaning NES owners finally got the chance to play this entertaining platformer, in which Bonk has to rescue the Moon Princess from the evil King Drool. He does his by headbutting enemies (or 'bonking' them, if you will) with his oversized head, and climbing walls by clamping his teeth onto them and gnashing his way upwards. A strange game, but a fun one. ■

FACT

In Japan, Bonk was called PC-Kid because the TurboGrafx-16 is called the PC Engine there. When the game was ported to the Famicom and Game Boy he was renamed FC-Kid and GB-Kid respectively.

BOULDER DASH

Year 1990
Publisher JVC / Data East
Developer Sakata SAS

AS FAR AS game plots go, having your dad tell you on his death bed to finish his adventure is pretty deep. That's the fate that's befallen Rockford, whose old man wants him to do what he never could and find the Secret Jewels of the Six Worlds. Rockford is a miner, and his adventure takes him through a series of mines full of diamonds and enemies. This game's all about gravity: while you can dig your way through all directions as you explore each level, if you dig the ground out from under a gem or rock it'll fall, killing anything underneath it (including you). Initially straightforward, the game gets trickier as it starts forcing you to trigger huge rockfalls and release fast enemies by collecting the gems blocking them. ■

FACT

Bouder Dash and its sequels have been released on over 25 systems over the years, from the NES and Game Boy to the 3DS and Xbox 360.

A BOY AND HIS BLOB: TROUBLE ON BLOBONIA

Year 1990
Publisher Absolute Entertainment
Developer Imagineering

DESIGNED AND PROGRAMMED by David Crane – the brains behind Activision's classic Pitfall – A Boy and His Blob tells the story of a nameless child who befriends a big white globule called Blobert. Blobert needs the boy's help to prevent the evil emperor from killing everyone on Blobert's home planet of Blobonia by feeding them nothing but marshmallows and chocolate. The game is a puzzle platformer with a very novel gimmick: by eating different coloured jelly beans, Blobert can turn into a number of different shapes. For example, a cola jelly bean turns him into a bubble so you can breathe underwater, while a punch-flavoured one turns him into a hole which lets you drop down into new areas (as in 'hole punch', geddit). ■

FACT

A remake of A Boy and His Blob was released on the Wii in 2009. This was then ported to other current-gen systems in 2016.

BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA

Year 1993
Publisher Sony Imagesoft
Developer Probe Software

THERE WERE A number of completely different games created to celebrate Francis Ford Coppola's gothic 1992 horror film, from the first-person PC game to the video-heavy Mega CD version. The NES – along with the Game Boy, Game Gear and Master System – received a side-scrolling action platformer in which Jonathan Harker has to fight his way through Transylvania to London, then back to Transylvania again, to catch and defeat Dracula in order to save his mistress Mina from a potential eternity as a vampiress. Along the way, Jonathan can collect a number of weapons, including rocks, axes and torches. However, the game's 'ultimate weapon' (according to the manual) is the 'triple rock', which essentially means the best way to beat Dracula is to lob stones at his head. ■

FACT

While most games save their main enemy until the final boss fight, this has you fighting Dracula no fewer than seven times in various forms.

BREAK TIME: THE NATIONAL POOL TOUR

Year 1993
Publisher FCI
Developer Opera House

A POOL GAME in which the aim is to 'become America's Number One Hustler'. It offers four types of pool – 8-ball, 9-ball, rotation and 14-1 rack – as well as the main National Pool Tour mode. Here you travel across America playing 9-ball tournaments against 'the pros', who are fictional characters with appropriately pool-themed names like Suzie Cue, Betty Bank Shot and Hot Shot Harry. The game ends on a cliffhanger, with the message: 'Congratulations! You have finally become America's No. 1 hustler! A new hero is born. But the World Championship still awaits you.' Sadly, there's no World Championship in the game, meaning your hustler remains untested on the global stage. And that's a hollow victory, if you ask me. ■

FACT

Publisher FCI is the American arm of Japanese media company FCG and exists to this day, delivering news to Japanese nationals living in the US and Europe.

BREAKTHRU

Year 1987
Publisher Data East
Developer Data East

BAD NEWS: SOME nondescript enemy soldiers have stolen your nondescript country's secret fighter plane, the PK430. It's up to you to get it back, by 'breaking thru' five different enemy strongholds in your trusty jumping ATV. Each of the game's five stages – mountain, bridge, prairie, city and airfield – is filled with soldiers, tanks, helicopters and other obstacles that must be either shot with your car's mounted gun or simply jumped over. Although its focus is on vehicular combat, the way your car is constantly moving sideways while shooting and jumping means BreakThru often feels more like an auto-scrolling action platformer. Because it's relatively easy and based on an arcade game, it can be beaten in under ten minutes with a little practice. ■

FACT

BreakThru was also released on the ZX Spectrum, where it had a massive bug: you could complete the whole game by holding down the jump button.

BUCKY O'HARE

Year 1992
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

BASED ON THE comic book and animated series of the same name, Bucky O'Hare is a run 'n gun action platformer similar to Contra (albeit significantly less difficult). KOMPLEX, the evil ruler of the Toad Empire, has instructed the Toad Air Marshal to kidnap Bucky's crew members and imprison each on a different planet. Bucky must travel to each planet, rescue his colleagues then head to the Toad Magma Tanker and destroy it once and for all. Bucky's crew act almost like weapons in a Mega Man game: once they're rescued you can switch between them at any point and use their unique abilities. Dead-Eye Duck, for example, can cling to walls, while Blinky can use a jetpack to fly out of danger. ■

FACT

Despite many thinking Bucky O'Hare is an imitation of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, both actually debuted in separate comic series in May 1984.

BUBBLE BOBBLE

Year 1988
Publisher Taito
Developer Taito

MANY GAMES IN the '80s and early '90s went with the classic 'an evil person has stolen your girlfriend' storyline, but there's a special sub-genre in which the hero is also transformed into a creature in the process. It's not clear why the evil-doer does this because it almost always gives the hero extra powers they wouldn't normally have, as is the case in Bubble Bobble. After their girlfriends are kidnapped by the nasty Baron Von Blubba, the cherubic Bubby and Bobby are also turned into 'bubble dragons' called Bub and Bob. This lets them spit bubbles at enemies, which can then be popped to defeat them. This unique method of disposing of enemies made Bubble Bobble a favourite among gamers, and its infuriatingly catchy music forever remains in the heads of anyone who plays it. If you're familiar with it, chances are you're already humming it right now. Bubble Bobble is notorious for its length – it contains 112 levels and another 112 bonus ones – and for having four different endings, two of which are 'bad' and essentially punish lonely players. It's impossible to get a good ending in a single-player game: the only way to get the best one is to play through all 224 levels and beat the final boss in two-player co-op mode. However, it does also have a secret 'drop-in' command (pause the game and press Select to add Player 2), so solo players can still get the best ending by pausing right before they beat the final boss and adding Bob. ■

FACT

Partly due to translation issues, Bub and Bob are referred to as Bobby and Babby during one 'good' ending, and Bubblun and Bobblun during the 'best' ending.

BUBBLE BOBBLE PART 2

Year 1993
Publisher Taito
Developer ITL

BUBBLE BOBBLE'S 'PROPER' sequel, Bubble Symphony, didn't make it to arcades until 1994. Before that, NES owners got this console-only follow-up starring… well, it's not quite clear. The game manual says it's Bub and Bob again, whereas the back of the box instead claims it's their descendants, Cubby and Rubby. Whoever you're playing as, this time you have to rescue their friend Judy, who's been kidnapped by the Skull Brothers. While it plays much the same as its predecessor, the stage backgrounds are more varied and you can now also hold the B button to inflate your body and slowly rise into the air. It's a shorter game though, with around 80 stages instead of the first game's 224. ■

FACT

There's a Game Boy version of Bubble Bobble Part 2 which makes things even more confusing by instead claiming you're playing as a character called Robby.

THE BUGS BUNNY BIRTHDAY BLOWOUT

Year 1990
Publisher Kemco
Developer Kemco

IT'S BUGS BUNNY'S 50th birthday (he was created in 1940) and his fan club has planned a big birthday party to celebrate. However, the rest of the Looney Tunes characters are jealous of the attention he's getting and so they unleash a horde of contraptions to stop him reaching the party. Players must help Bugs – armed with his hammer – fight his way through evil soap boxes, poisonous frogs and 'jumping telescopic bullet sprinklers' in order to make it to the celebration, at which point it's revealed all the Looney Tunes are actually there and 'had just moments ago been playing some very funny tricks'. So it's all good in the end, though Bugs will presumably never forget that time all his pals tried to kill him. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of the game is called Happy Birthday Bugs. Oddly, the western version technically is too, because that's all it says on the title screen.

THE BUGS BUNNY CRAZY CASTLE

Year	1989
Publisher	Kemco
Developer	Kemco

THE FIRST ENTRY in Kemco's massively confusing nine-game Crazy Castle series, which often features completely different titles and characters in each region. The Bugs Bunny Crazy Castle, known in Japan as Roger Rabbit (told you) has Bugs travelling through 60 platform-based levels in an attempt to rescue Honey Bunny from Wile E. Coyote, Yosemite Sam, Daffy Duck and Sylvester. Unlike most other platform games, Bugs can't jump here: this makes it more of a puzzle game in which you have to use doors, stairs and weapons such as safes and boxing gloves to navigate each stage safely. This was eventually ported to the Game Boy, and was once again changed so that this time the main character was Mickey Mouse. ■

FACT

Other characters appearing in regional versions of subsequent Crazy Castle games include The Real Ghostbusters, Garfield and Woody Woodpecker.

BUMP 'N' JUMP

Year	1988
Publisher	Vic Tokai
Developer	Sakata SAS

VIDEO GAME TITLES rarely get more literal than Bump 'n' Jump, a top-down arcade racing game in which bumping and jumping are indeed the two main things the player is expected to do. The bumping is because you're racing against time – trying to reach checkpoints before your timer runs out – but a bunch of enemy cars are getting in your way. The aim, then, is to bump into them and force them into the walls to destroy them. Sometimes it all gets too much, or the road can end, and that's where the jumping comes into it: with the press of a button your car can leap over enemies and gaps with the greatest of ease. ■

FACT

Bump 'n' Jump has had a number of different names in Japan. The original arcade game was known as Burnin' Rubber, while the Famicom version goes by Buggy Popper.

BURAI FIGHTER

Year	1990
Publisher	Taxan
Developer	Taxan

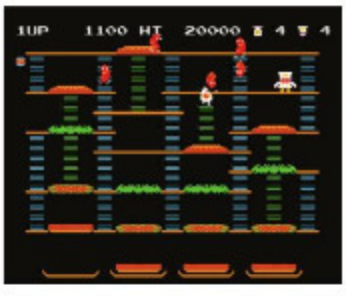
THOSE PESKY BURAI are needing a smack in the chops, and it's up to you to see to it that it's delivered. What are the Burai, you ask? Why, they're cyborg super-brains blessed with extreme intelligence, and they're keen on using their vast mental capabilities to dominate the entire universe. Burai Fighter is a side-scrolling shooter where your nameless hero, armed with a jet pack and a laser gun, has to fly through the Burai's seven bases and destroy the super-mutants guarding each one. One interesting feature the game has is hidden rooms which occasionally appear at the edge of the screen: if you push into one as you pass it the screen scrolls in a different direction, giving you access to the secret room. ■

FACT

Burai Fighter was one of the first games produced by Ken Lobb, who went on to work for Nintendo. The Klobb gun in GoldenEye 007 is named after him.

BURGERTIME

Year	1987
Publisher	Data East
Developer	Data East



A PORT OF Data East's iconic 1982 arcade game. Playing as the anxious chef Peter Pepper, players have to make four enormous hamburgers by navigating around a ladder-filled maze and running over the huge ingredients to drop them down to the platform below. Once every ingredient is dropped down to the bottom of the screen, the player moves onto the next level. It's not as easy as that, though, because chasing Peter are bizarre anthropomorphic eggs and sausages who are somehow angry that these burgers are being made. Maybe they're jealous that they aren't being eaten instead. Regardless, they can be kept at bay by throwing pepper at them, which stuns them. ■

FACT

The odd walking ingredients that chase Peter around each level actually have official names: Mr Hot Dog, Mr Egg and Mr Pickle. So now you know.

CABAL

Year 1990
Publisher Fabtek
Developer Rare

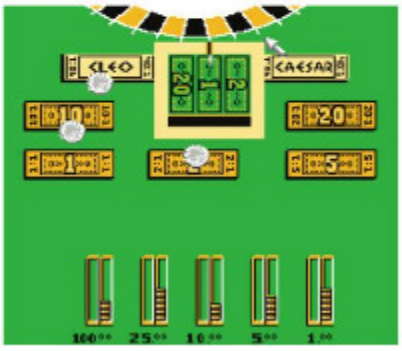
YOU'RE A COVERT agent who's spent a week undercover at the training camp for D.R.A.T. – the Dreaded Republic of Allied Terrorists. It's time to blow your cover, though, and that means pumping countless bullets into everything that moves and most things that don't. Originally an arcade game by Japanese developer TAD Corporation, the NES version of Cabal was instead handled by Rare. Like its coin-op counterpart, it's a very early take on the cover shooter in which players use a cursor to fire at enemies like a rail shooter or FPS, but can also run left and right to get behind cover and avoid enemy fire. The cover mechanic was revolutionary for its time, at least until games like Gears Of War reinvented it. ■

FACT

The developers at Rare weren't given the arcade game's source code, so they had to play the arcade game over and over again and recreate it from scratch.

CAESARS PALACE

Year 1992
Publisher Virgin Games
Developer Realtime Associates



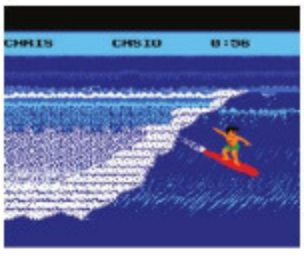
THE VIDEO GAME version of the popular Las Vegas casino hotel offers – according to the manual – 'a royal wonderland that will dazzle you with unparallelled excitement and challenge your every skill with games of chance'. Quite how games of chance can challenge your skill isn't clear but, regardless, there are seven games on offer here: video poker, three different slot machines, blackjack, roulette and the 'Big Six Money Wheel'. You start with $1000 in chips, and when you decide to leave the casino you get a different ending depending on your total winnings: if you earn $140,000 or more you leave the casino in a fancy red sports car, and if you go bust you leave on a bus instead. ■

FACT

The real Caesars Palace opened in Las Vegas in 1966 and has a 4,500 square foot, 24-hour poker room.

CALIFORNIA GAMES

Year 1989
Publisher Milton Bradley
Developer Epyx



EPYX WAS WELL known (among other things) for Summer Games and Winter Games, its Olympic-themed sports compilation games. Keen to continue the series' popularity despite running out of high-profile competitions to draw inspiration from, Epyx came up with California Games, which ditched the athletic tracks and mountain slalom courses of the Olympics in favour of the beaches and streets of Los Angeles. While some versions of California Games were missing some events, the NES version is among those that includes all six: half-pipe skateboarding, footbag, surfing, roller skating, BMX and the notoriously tricky flying disc. Not only was California Games well received, it ultimately ended up outselling Summer Games and Winter Games, going on to become Epyx's best-selling game ever. ■

FACT

If you've ever played a PC game you may be familiar with DirectX technology. Its inventor, Ken Nicholson, designed the footbag event in California Games.

CAPCOM'S GOLD MEDAL CHALLENGE '92

Year 1992
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

ONE OF A number of unofficial athletics games conveniently timed to release around the same time as the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, Capcom's effort includes an impressive total of 18 events, although many are similar (for example, the 100m Breaststroke, 100m Butterfly, 100m Freestyle and 200m Medley are all controlled pretty much the same way). Of particular note is the Marathon event, which isn't often featured in Olympic-themed games for obvious reasons. Rather than stretching out button-bashing over 26 miles (42km) though, it's actually more of a strategic affair in which you decide how much effort your runner is going to put into each of the course's six legs. The aim is to decide when to conserve energy and when to go for it. ■

FACT

Seemingly feeling more brazen in its home country, Capcom decided to name the Japanese version of the game the less subtle Capcom Barcelona '92.

CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE AVENGERS

Year 1991
Publisher Data East
Developer Data East

IN 1991 DATA East created a Captain America arcade game which offered beat 'em up gameplay similar to the likes of Final Fight or Double Dragon. Other systems would eventually get ports of this arcade version, but Data East's NES offering is a completely different game with the same title. This version is instead a side-scrolling action platformer in which players control both the Cap'n himself and Hawkeye, switching between them at will. The aim is to rescue Iron Man and the Vision, who have both been captured by the Red Skull. There's also a battle mode, where two players fight to the death in a single-screen arena. Here, Player 2 gets to select one of three villains: Wizard, Crossbones or Ultron. ■

FACT

Data East made one more licensed Avengers game in 1995, an arcade fighting game called Avengers in Galactic Storm.

CAPTAIN PLANET AND THE PLANETEERS

Year 1991
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Chris Gray Enterprises

EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE '90s eco-friendly superhero made it to the NES in the shape of this part shoot 'em up, part platformer from Mindscape. A number of dastardly deviants are wrecking the environment by spilling oil, dumping toxic waste in Yellowstone Park, killing elephants for ivory and destroying the ozone layer, so it's up to the five Planeteers to take on the frankly hefty task of putting a stop to them with the help of Captain Planet. Each of the game's five stages are split into two sections: the first is a vehicle section in which the Planeteers approach the location in question by plane, submarine or helicopter. Once they get there, the main man is summoned and the game becomes an action platformer. ■

FACT

The final boss is Duke Nukem, a villain in the Captain Planet cartoon. He predates the more well-known foul-mouthed video game character by at least a year.

CAPTAIN SKYHAWK

Year 1990
Publisher Milton Bradley
Developer Rare

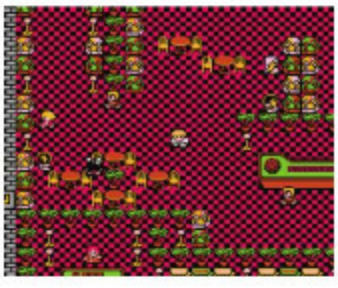
ALIENS HAVE INVADED Earth and their mission, it won't surprise you to find out, is to destroy us all. They've built four bases in remote corners of the globe and plan to use them to drain the Earth's energy, leaving the planet open to attack. It's up to the heroic Captain Skyhawk, in his trusty F-14VTS plane, to do two things: destroy the four bases, and also drop off supplies at various underground caverns so that the world's scientists can finish creating a super weapon to destroy the alien space station. This is all played out in an isometric viewpoint, similar to Sega's Zaxxon, in which players have to be sure to avoid not only alien attacks but the scenery too. ■

FACT

Despite the game not having a first-person perspective, the manual insists you're actually Captain Skyhawk, armed with 'a spy satellite viewer that lets you see your plane from above'.

CASINO KID

Year 1989
Publisher Sofel
Developer Sofel



SETTING ASIDE THE fact that children shouldn't be gambling in a casino anyway, Casino Kid takes an interesting approach to the strangely saturated NES gambling game genre by adding a storyline. Playing as the titular kid, your aim is to make as much money as possible in the city of Lost Wages (ahem) so that you can eventually challenge the notorious Casino King and claim his metaphorical throne. While you can only choose between blackjack and poker – the Japanese version also included slot machines and roulette – the game does at least attempt to make things feel less random by adding bunny girls and tourists to the hallway: talking to them will reveal tips about which tables to use and how your poker opponents will act. ■

FACT

The Japanese version is based on the manga series *$1,000,000 Kid* and uses real names like Las Vegas and the Golden Nugget casino.

CASINO KID II

Year 1993
Publisher Sofel
Developer Sofel

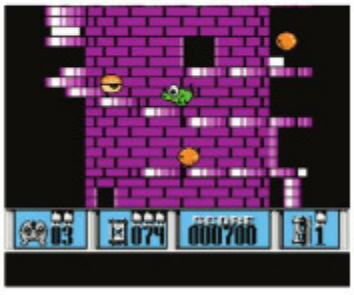
WHEREAS IN REAL life the idea of a child becoming the king of a casino would have likely ended with his parents in custody, in the world of video games all is well. As such, Casino Kid II picks up a year later with our betting boy still considered the best gambler in the US. However, a 'mystery man' has now challenged the Casino Kid to take on the best the world has to offer, meaning this time you're touring the globe to play blackjack, poker and roulette. Oddly, it turns out this mysterious challenger is actually the Casino King you already beat in the last game, meaning he's effectively sent you around the globe just to end up facing a guy you're already better than. ■

FACT

Oddly, despite being the new Casino King, you only start this game with $200. It's never made quite clear what the kid wasted all his money on.

CASTELIAN

Year 1991
Publisher Triffix / Storm
Developer Bits Studios



THE IDYLLIC ISLAND nation of Jemmerville is under attack by mysterious forces. Seven huge alien towers have appeared out of nowhere and are now surrounding the island, their aim being to stop the island's lucrative gem-mining industry in its tracks. It's up to a little frog-shaped creature called Julius to climb to the top of each tower and plant a bomb at the peak so he can destroy them and save Jemmerville before it's too late. At its core Castelian is a straightforward platform game, but it's one with a very eye-catching graphical style. As you make your way up the circular towers Julius stays in the middle of the screen, meaning the tower rotates around him. This gives an impressive 3D effect which was rare for its time. ■

FACT

Castelian has been released on a number of formats under numerous different names. You may recognise it as Nebulus or Tower Topper.

CASTLE OF DRAGON

Year 1990
Publisher SETA
Developer SETA

A CURIOUS SIDE-SCROLLING action game in which most of your enemy encounters play out almost like mini boss fights. The gameplay is an acquired taste, in that while it initially appears to be a standard side-scrolling hack-and-slash game it's actually a much slower affair, with most enemy battles separated as standalone confrontations with energy bars. The game's plot is a little more generic, with more made-up names than you can shake a sword at: playing as Geraden, the Duke of Menlary, you have to track down and defeat the evil Dragon Master Darklarza, and in doing so save the kingdom of Offeria and rescue Princess Amoreena. While far from the best game on the NES, it does have some of the best music on the system. ■

FACT

Castle of Dragon was based on an arcade game, also by SETA, often known as Dragon Unit. It's extremely hard to come by, however.

CASTLEQUEST

Year 1989
Publisher Nexoft
Developer ASCII

IF SOMEONE HAD decided to plant a tree every time the NES got a game about saving a princess, the rainforests would have been saved by the early '90s. This time the fair maiden in question is Princess Margarita, and this time her captor is Mad Mizer, the Dark Lord of the Groken Castle. Playing as Prince Rafael, players have to make their way to the castle and navigate through its maze of rooms in order to find and defeat Mad Mizer. Castlequest is a puzzle platformer featuring 100 rooms filled with doors, keys and a variety of pushable objects. There are six different colours of door and key, so often the trick is figuring out the right sequence of doors to open. ■

FACT

In the Japanese Famicom version of the game, players start with four lives. In the western version this is bumped up ever so slightly to 50.

CASTLEVANIA

Year	1987
Publisher	Konami
Developer	Konami

VERY FEW THIRD-PARTY NES games are as iconic as Castlevania, and that it appeared so early into the system's life is even more impressive. The first game in a series that now spans more than 30 years and 35 games, Castlevania tells the story of Simon Belmont, a vampire hunter who travels to Count Dracula's castle to defeat him (although Dracula is only ever referred to as 'The Count' in this first game's western release). Along the way Belmont faces a number of other iconic monsters, including Frankenstein's Monster, Medusa, the Grim Reaper and even a couple of Mummies for good measure.

The game is an action platformer, and players are primarily armed with a whip which can be upgraded for length and power. Simon can also collect special weapons, which can be activated by holding up while attacking: these include an axe (which flies in an upwards arc), a boomerang shaped like a cross, a stopwatch that freezes enemies, and holy water (though Nintendo's anti-religion stance means it's instead called a 'fire bomb').

What makes Castlevania so interesting with the benefit of today's hindsight is that it's one of the few games in the series that doesn't follow what would eventually become the 'Metroidvania' template of a large map that can be freely explored and requires backtracking. Although there's a slight degree of free movement in terms of occasionally being able to go off-track to collect some bonus items, for the most part this initial offering is a linear experience, with 18 distinct stages and a number of boss fights appearing at set moments. This does make it feel slightly different to the Castlevania games most modern fans are used to, but it's to the game's credit that more than three decades later it's still an immensely playable and enjoyable experience. Launching axes at the giant bat in the first boss battle is still as satisfying as ever, as is whipping your way through hordes of ghosts and successfully navigating your way through a tricky series of floating Medusa heads.

FACT

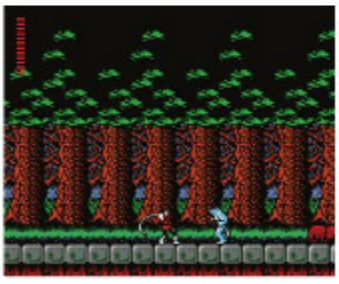
Castlevania's end credits has a 'cast' section, with modified versions of famous horror actors' names including Christopher Bee (Lee), Boris Karloffice (Karloff) and Belo (Bela) Lugosi.

It isn't without its frustrating moments: for example, there are plenty of bottomless pits dotted around the castle and many enemies are cleverly placed in such a way that taking a hit from one will invariably result in you falling directly into a hole and dying instantly. As with many games of its era, though, Castlevania is an adventure that's supposed to be attempted over and over again until you master every screen, know where every hidden secret lies, and know the patterns to defeat every boss.

Most impressive of all is the way that Castlevania actually makes you feel like you're on a journey. At a time when so many action adventure games consisted of a series of similar stages, Castlevania's wide variety of backgrounds and its map screen showing your progress gave the real sense that you were making your way through this enormous castle and its grounds. Without using a single word, its level design told the story. ■

CASTLEVANIA II: SIMON'S QUEST

Year 1988
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami



DESPITE DEFEATING DRACULA at the end of Castlevania, Simon Belmont still feels rough. It becomes clear why when the vision of a maiden appears to him and tells him he's cursed, and the only way of lifting the curse is to find Dracula's five body parts and burn them in his castle. Unlike the first game, Castlevania II is a non-linear affair in which the player explores the game world freely, talking to townspeople and buying items from merchants. Unfortunately, it wasn't nearly as well-received as its predecessor, partly thanks to the fact that some of the clues given on your journey are so cryptic – perhaps due to bad translation – that beating the game without some sort of guide is impossible for most players. ■

FACT

While the first Castlevania game simply refers to your nemesis as The Count, here he's explicitly named Count Dracula for the first time in the west.

CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE

Year 1990
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

PERHAPS REALISING THAT Castlevania II was a bit too clever for its own good, Konami brought things back to basics for its third NES stake 'em up… at least, to some extent. Dracula's Curse is actually a prequel: set 215 years before the first game, it puts the players in the fifteenth century boots of Trevor Belmont – an ancestor of Simon – as he tries to stop Dracula and his monsters from taking over Europe. While this game's levels are linear, the twist is that there are branching paths to take, meaning the route taken in multiple playthroughs can be completely different. You can also team up with three new helper characters, including Dracula's son Alucard, who you can switch to mid-game. ■

FACT

The animated Castlevania series that was commissioned by Netflix (and can be viewed there) is based on the events of Castlevania III.

CAVEMAN GAMES

Year 1990
Publisher Data East
Developer Painting By Numbers

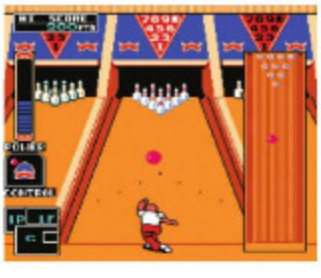
AN (EXTREMELY) OLD-SCHOOL twist on event-based sports titles like Track & Field and California Games, Caveman Games consists of six different prehistoric sports that have been forgotten over time, probably because they never existed. These include Fire-Making (the winner is the first to create a flame by rubbing two sticks together), Clubbing (a fight to the death with clubs), Dino Race (a hurdles race while riding a dinosaur), Saber Race (hurdles again, but this time on foot while being chased by a saber-tooth tiger) and Dino Vault (pole-vaulting over a T-Rex without being eaten). Easily the most controversial though is Mate Toss, which is essentially a variation on the shot put in which the projectile is instead your wife. ■

FACT

Caveman Games was also released on the Commodore 64 and MS-DOS PCs under the slightly better name of Caveman Ugh-lympics.

CHAMPIONSHIP BOWLING

Year 1989
Publisher Romstar
Developer Another



FOR DECADES DEVELOPERS have tried to make 10-pin bowling games good value for money, and more often than not they fail (the only big example of a successful one is the bowling game in Wii Sports). As an early attempt at the genre, Championship Bowling is a good example of why this has been the case: other than setting the number of players and which lane you bowl in, there are no other options to ensure the game's longevity. The actual bowling mechanics are sound enough: choose one of four characters, position them on the lane, press a button to set your spin and another to set your power then see how well you did. This isn't enough to keep players' attention for any reasonable length of time, though. ■

FACT

The oddly translated manual implies lefties are dangerous by introducing one of its characters with: 'BE CAREFUL! He's left-handed.'

CHAMPIONSHIP POOL

Year 1993
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Bitmasters

NOT MANY POOL games can claim to be officially endorsed by the Billiard Congress of America but Championship Pool certainly can, proudly displaying its logo on the title screen. When it comes to game modes, this one's filled to the brim: as well as a Tournament mode in which you have to win a regional qualifier before making it to the finals, there's also a Challenge mode where you can practice your skills and a Party mode for up to eight players. There are also no fewer than 10 different types of pool here – 3-ball, 8-ball, 9-ball, 10-ball, 15-ball, 14.1 Continuous, Rotation, Straight Pool, Equal Offence and Speed Pool – so it's safe to say the whole package is fairly comprehensive. ■

FACT

The game's lead designer and programmer, Franz Lanzinger, originally worked at Atari where he programmed popular arcade game Crystal Castles.

CHAMPIONSHIP RALLY

Year 1991
Publisher HAL Laboratory
Developer Human Entertainment

NES COLLECTORS OFTEN struggle to get hold of this one, because it was only released in Australia. It's a top-down racing game similar to the likes of Micro Machines, where the aim is to become the world rally champion. You do this by competing in 34 different races through the likes of Monte Carlo, Sweden, Argentina and Greece, trying to score as many points as possible. There's a basic tuning system in the game where players can change between 2WD and 4WD drive trains, and normal and turbo intakes. You can also choose between snow, tarmac and gravel tyres: each of the tracks has a certain surface so choosing the right tyre is key for grip and performance. ■

FACT

A year after its Australian release, Championship Rally launched on the Famicom under the name Exciting Rally: World Championship.

THE CHESSMASTER

Year 1990
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer Software Toolworks

IN THE WORLD of chess video games, The Chessmaster used to be… well, the chessmaster. Over the course of eleven games spread out over two decades, more than five million Chessmaster games were sold, and at one time its chess engine was considered the 14th best in the world. The NES version offers 16 different skill settings, ranging from Newcomer up to Infinite (in which the Chessmaster will think forever about the best move to make until you tell it to move). It has a library of over 150,000 opening positions, and also offers a 'War Room' viewpoint in which you get to see what the Chessmaster is thinking: this is designed to help those who are learning chess. ■

FACT

The man in the iconic image of the Chessmaster that featured in many versions of the game is actor Will Hare. He was the farmer in Back to the Future who shot at Marty with a shotgun in 1955.

CHIP 'N DALE: RESCUE RANGERS

Year 1990
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

ONE OF MANY Disney-licensed offerings from Capcom, Rescue Rangers is based on the Saturday morning cartoon show of the same name. The titular chipmunks are trying to find their neighbour Mandy's kitten – which has gone missing – but they're also concerned about reports that there are mechanical bulldogs and robotic rats doing the rounds. It appears that their nemesis Fat Cat is up to no good, so it's up to the duo to investigate. The game is a platformer with a block-throwing gimmick: players can pick up objects, from crates to giant apples, and throw them at their enemies. Unusually for a game of its era, there's also a two-player co-op mode in which both players appear on-screen at the same time. ■

FACT

In case you can't tell them apart, Chip is the one with the small black nose (like a chocolate chip), while Dale is the one with the larger red nose.

CHIP 'N DALE: RESCUE RANGERS 2

Year 1994
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

THE RESCUE RANGERS are back, and this time they're dealing with more than a mere missing kitten. Fat Cat is once again causing mischief, but this time he's stolen the precious Urn of the Pharaoh. It's up to Chip and Dale to get the urn back and lock Fat Cat up in prison once and for all. Chip 'n Dale 2 plays a lot like the original game for the most part, with the same object-throwing gameplay and co-op multiplayer option as before. This time the levels are played in a linear order (in the first game the player could choose in which order to take them on), and there's also a new co-op move where one player can pick up their partner and throw them at enemies. ■

FACT

Both Chip 'n Dale games appear in The Disney Afternoon Collection, a current-gen Capcom compilation that also includes DuckTales 1 and 2, Darkwing Duck and TaleSpin.

CHUBBY CHERUB

Year 1986
Publisher Bandai
Developer Tose

AS THE NAME suggests, Chubby Cherub is a relatively chunky, angelic chap. It quickly becomes clear exactly why he's so rotund, as his main ability is eating almost anything he comes across: strawberries, rice balls, kebabs, you name it. There's a reason for this rampant greed, as every time you eat food his power meter is topped up. When you run out of power you can no longer fly, and what's the point of a grounded cherub? Along the way, the chubster has to rescue his friends, who are being held hostage by burglars. In case you haven't quite managed to figure it out yet, the tone of this game is all over the place. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of Chubby Cherub was actually based on Q-taro, a ghost character from a manga series.

CIRCUS CAPER

Year 1990
Publisher Toho
Developer Advance Communication Company

TIM AND HIS sister Judy approach a circus, but they only have enough money for one ticket. Judy goes in, but when Tim goes to pick her up at the end, he's informed by a chap called Mr Magic that he's kidnapped her, for reasons not quite made clear. Tim enters the circus tent to rescue her, and the game – which is a standard side-scrolling action platformer – begins. Along the way Tim has to punch numerous clowns in the face, and can also enter doors to trigger odd bonus mini-games. The first, for example, has you teaming up with a bear to jump over flames on the ground. If you ask me, this circus clearly doesn't have a safety certificate. ■

FACT

This is another game heavily modified from its Japanese release. The Famicom version is based on manga and anime series *Moeru! Onii-san*, aka *The Burning Wild Man*.

CITY CONNECTION

Year 1988
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Jaleco

A SORT OF cross between Pac-Man and a platformer, City Connection puts you in the role of a jumping car with paint on its wheels. The aim is to paint every section of the floor on each looping stage, while avoiding cop cars in the process. If you can paint each individual section, you'll move onto the next stage where you'll repeat the process. Believe it or not, there's actually a plot to this: you're apparently a criminal who's broken into 'an exclusive paint store in New York City' and have decided for some reason that you want to paint all the roads before travelling on to other cities to repeat this. Hey, it's as good a reason as any. ■

FACT

In one cut-scene the car's driver is seen having a smoke: it's not clear how this managed to get past Nintendo's inspections as this was a big no-no at the time.

CLASH AT DEMONHEAD

Year 1990
Publisher Vic Tokai
Developer Vic Tokai

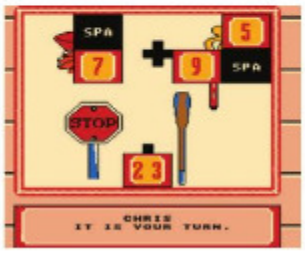
IN CASE YOU were wondering which NES game protagonist had the greatest name, I'll put you out of your misery: Clash at Demonhead has you playing as Sergeant Billy 'Big Bang' Blitz(!) as he sets out to rescue Professor Plum, the creator of the Doomsday Bomb. He's being held captive at the top of Demonhead Mountain, so you have to rescue him and deactivate the bomb to make sure the world isn't blown to smithereens. This is a Metroidvania style open-ended platformer, but one in which the abilities you gain are a little more varied than usual. As well as getting new weapons you can earn the ability to shrink, fly, heal yourself and teleport. ■

FACT

Clash at Demonhead is the name of one of the bands in the *Scott Pilgrim vs The World* movie and comic books, so it clearly has at least one fan.

CLASSIC CONCENTRATION

Year 1990
Publisher GameTek
Developer Softie



GAMETEK MADE A number of video games based on popular US game shows, including this one based on the 1987–1991 series *Classic Concentration*, hosted by *Jeopardy!*'s Alex Trebek. As in the TV version, players are presented with a 25-square grid and have to turn them over to find matching pairs. As pairs are removed a cryptic picture puzzle is slowly revealed, and the aim is to figure out the phrase before your opponent does. The game also features the show's final round, in which players try to solve a smaller grid within 35 seconds in order to win a car (though this is obviously less exciting when you win it and realise a BMW isn't suddenly going to appear in your driveway). ■

FACT

Each time you finish a game you're given a four-digit code. This can be entered the next time you play to make sure no puzzles are repeated until you've played them all.

CLIFFHANGER

Year 1993
Publisher Sony Imagesoft
Developer Spidersoft

BASED ON THE the hit Sylvester Stallone action movie of the same name, Cliffhanger is similar to many other film tie-ins in that the 8-bit NES version differs greatly from the 16-bit ones. Whereas SNES, Mega Drive and Mega CD owners were treated to a side-scrolling beat 'em up similar to Final Fight or Double Dragon, the NES game is instead a more traditional 2D platformer in which you run, jump and fight your way through six stages in order to reach Qualen, a megalomaniac terrorist leader who's kidnapped your friends. As far as action platformers go it's fairly generic, right down to the weapons you can pick up: a knife, a gun, a stick of dynamite and some rocks. ■

FACT

As ridiculous as the *Cliffhanger* movie is, a lot was cut after test audiences criticised how ridiculous it was. At one point, Stallone's character made a 300-foot (91m) jump.

CLU CLU LAND

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1

ONE OF THOSE first-party NES games that isn't quite remembered to the same degree as the Marios and Zeldas of its time, Clu Clu Land is an odd take on Pac-Man where players have to travel around a maze uncovering gold ingots that, when all revealed, usually form a picture. The game's protagonist is a balloonfish called Bubbles, and whereas in Pac-Man you can move in all directions, Bubbles can only move forward. To turn, Bubbles has to hold her hand out and grab one of the levels' turning posts, which let her swing round. Although it isn't one of Nintendo's major hits, Bubbles did return as a hidden playable character in 2005's Game Boy Advance game, DK: King of Swing. ■

FACT

The name Clu Clu Land is actually a mistranslation. In Japan, 'Kuru Kuru' means going round and round, so it should have been called Kuru Kuru Land.

COBRA COMMAND

Year 1988
Publisher Data East
Developer Data East

IN EARLY 1988 Data East released Cobra Command in arcades. It was a standard side-scrolling shoot 'em up in which you flew a helicopter from left to right, destroying everything in its wake. Later that year Cobra Command came to the NES, but despite the box referring to it as the 'arcade hit' it was actually a completely different game, far more similar to Broderbund's Choplifter. Although you're still controlling a helicopter, this time you control the direction it moves. Armed with bullets and missiles (for ground-based enemies) you have to navigate through six stages, killing enemies and stopping to pick up hostages. You can also upgrade your chopper, something else that isn't in the arcade version. ■

FACT

The game ends with a shot of a soldier holding up a rifle in front of a massive American flag. It's also revealed that your character's name is General Power.

COBRA TRIANGLE

Year 1989
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Rare

ALTHOUGH IT'S NOT immediately obvious at first glance, Cobra Triangle is a heavily modified successor to Rare's RC Pro-Am, released the year before. Switching from radio-controlled cars to speedboats, Cobra Triangle mixes things up a bit by giving you a range of different stage types – eight in total – rather than just simple races. As well as these races, other missions include guarding swimmers from space ships, taking mines to a disposal area, collecting pods and – most memorably – facing off against a selection of monsters. These include giant enemy crabs, sea serpents and sharks. The variety of activities on offer across the game's 25 stages make Cobra Triangle an entertaining choice to this day. ■

FACT

Cobra Triangle was one of the 30 games featured in Rare's 2015 retro compilation Rare Replay, which is available on Xbox One.

CODE NAME: VIPER

Year 1990
Publisher Capcom
Developer Arc System Works

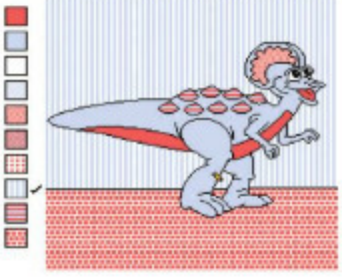
A MASSIVE DRUG syndicate is operating from seven hideouts in South America. As Special Forces agent Kenny Smith, code named Viper, it's up to you to visit each hideout, rescue a missing agent in each and try to bring the syndicate down to its knees. This action platformer pays more than a passing resemblance to Namco's Rolling Thunder, with a lanky hero shooting enemies while jumping up and down between floors and entering doors for safety. One thing it does have that Rolling Thunder doesn't is the uncomfortable fact that the developers made Viper's trousers the same colour as his face, making it look like he's running around completely naked from the waist down and giving his codename a different meaning. ■

FACT

As is often the case, the Japanese version of the game has a much better title. It translates to Human Weapon Dead Fox.

COLOR A DINOSAUR

Year 1993
Publisher Virgin Games
Developer FarSight Studios



CREATED BY DR Stephen Clarke-Willson for his four-year-old son Sam, Color a Dinosaur was created with a budget of $30,000 and was, according to Clarke-Willson himself, produced 'on the absolute cheapest cartridge Nintendo made' and made 'exclusive to Walmart'. As the name suggests, it's a colouring book featuring 12 different illustrations of dinosaurs. Players choose from a range of different eight-colour palettes (some of which offer special effects like glowing colours) and colour in the dinos by choosing a colour, switching between areas with the D-pad and pressing the A button to fill them in. Color a Dinosaur has appeared on numerous 'Worst NES Game' lists over the years due to its simplicity. ■

FACT

The music for Color a Dinosaur was actually composed by Tommy Tallarico, who went on to compose the likes of Earthworm Jim, Aladdin and Cool Spot.

COMMANDO

Year 1986
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

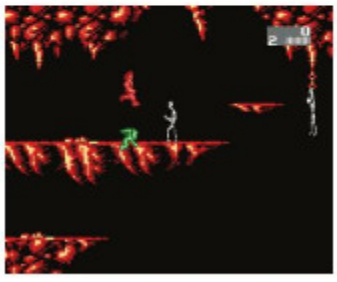
A VERTICALLY-SCROLLING RUN-AND-GUN shooter based on Capcom's arcade game of the same name. Players take on the role of Super Joe, a soldier who's been dropped off by a helicopter into the middle of an enemy-infested jungle. Super Joe has to make his way out of the jungle by emptying bullets into everyone that moves. He's also armed with a limited number of grenades, which he can lob to destroy large groups of enemies and also take out the enemy commanders who hide behind barricades. Super Joe may be the hero here, but he ultimately doesn't end up looking too super: he's the soldier you have to rescue in Capcom's later game Bionic Commando, which must be pretty awkward. ■

FACT

The game's badly-translated ending says: 'Your all mission is all over. Thank you for playing. Your great player. This game was ended.'

CONAN: THE MYSTERIES OF TIME

Year 1991
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Mindscape



THE MIGHTY BARBARIAN warrior Conan has to claim the throne of Aquilonia by finding the four burial urns of the early kings of Aquilonia and returning them to their proper resting place. Although this is a licensed game featuring the use of the popular Conan the Barbarian character, The Mysteries of Time was not actually initially designed with Conan in mind. It is in fact an NES port of System 3's computer game Myth, with its 'teenage boy sent back in time to legendary eras' plot replaced with the Conan one. As such, it carries over all of Myth's least popular features, like the fiddly weapon-switching and controls: the need to press Up to jump instead of the A or B button was one particular complaint. ■

FACT

Of the eleven pages in Conan's manual which don't consist of copyright and legal information, nine of them tell the game's story in painstaking detail.

CONFLICT

Year 1990
Publisher Vic Tokai
Developer Vic Tokai

A COMPLEX (FOR its time) two-player strategy game, with the aim being to destroy the other player's commander's unit (a tank marked 'H'). One player controls the blue army (the Western Bloc) while the other controls the red army (the Eastern Bloc), each of which has a different range of planes, tanks, trucks and jeeps available. The game's map is a hexagon-based grid, with each hexagon containing different terrain which can affect unit movement. Players can earn 'fame' by destroying enemy units or occupying cities and airports: these fame points can then be spent on building more powerful units. When playing against a computer opponent, they start with more fame points: after all, nobody ever said war was fair. ■

FACT

The Conflict manual has an extremely large table showing the likely results of every combination of red and blue unit type fighting each other.

CONQUEST OF THE CRYSTAL PALACE

Year 1990
Publisher Asmik Corporation
Developer Quest

NOT ACTUALLY A sports game based on trying to defeat a London football team, this is in fact an action platformer about a 15-year-old boy called Farron. Along with his fearless dog Zap, Farron has to restore peace in the Crystal Palace (which is the game's kingdom) by tracking down the evil Zaras and destroying him. One of the game's quirks is that before playing you can choose one of three power-up crystals to help you out. Spirit lets you throw fireballs, Life gives you more health and Flight lets you jump higher. This, along with the ability to summon Zap to attack enemies on your behalf, leads to slightly more varied gameplay than in many other 2D action platformers at the time. ■

FACT

The game's designer (Yasumi Matsuno) and composer (Masaharu Iwata) would go on to work together on the likes of Final Fantasy Tactics and Final Fantasy XII.

CONTRA

Year 1988
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

ALTHOUGH CONTRA WASN'T the first 'run-and-gun' game ever created, its popularity and perfectly balanced gameplay mechanics mean it's become synonymous with the genre. Set in the Amazon jungle in 1987, the game has Special Forces elites Lance and Bill sent to investigate reports that a large object from outer space which crash-landed 30 years prior has suddenly powered up, and that its alien host Red Falcon has begun plans to take over the Earth. The aim is to blast your way through eight stages, taking out the Royal Guard (Red Falcon's alien soldiers), in an attempt to reach the top dog himself and destroy him.

Contra is notorious for its high difficulty level, with hordes of enemies and one-hit kills. Although a number of NES games were similarly hard, Contra is more fondly remembered because its deaths rarely feel cheap: with practice and patience players can eventually learn each enemy's attack patterns and figure out how to defeat them without dying. It's also notable for being one of the earliest games to use the famous Konami code, a cheat (Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A, or variations on this) which usually makes games easier in some way: in this case giving the player 30 lives instead of just three.

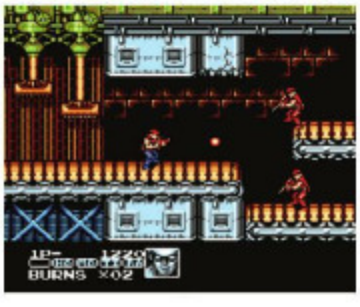
Because censorship laws in some European countries prohibited violent games like Contra, the European version of the game was modified. Lance and Bill went from being shirtless soldiers to cyborgs, and the game was renamed Probotector to give the impression that the violence was between robots, not humans. ■

FACT

The Probotector name remained in Europe for nearly a decade, with every Contra game being renamed until Contra: Legacy of War arrived on the PlayStation in 1997.

CONTRA FORCE

Year 1992
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami



THE THIRD GAME in the Contra series (the second being Super C), Contra Force is a standalone story that has nothing to do with its predecessors. This time the threat isn't aliens taking over the world, but more traditional terrorists. A criminal organisation called DNME has murdered an informant, so it's up to the new C-Force squad to take them out before they destroy the city, 'cleverly' named Neocity. The main difference between Contra Force and previous Contra games is that you can now choose between four different characters, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. If that isn't enough to convince you that it's worth a look, bear in mind that one of these characters is called Beans. ■

FACT

Contra Force was originally supposed to be a Japanese game called Arc Hound, with nothing to do with Contra. The Japan release was scrapped, but it came to America with its new Contra name.

COOL WORLD

Year 1993
Publisher Ocean
Developer Ocean

BASED ON THE flop 1992 movie starring Brad Pitt and an animated Kim Basinger, the Cool World NES game features a completely different plot. In the tunnel between the real world and Cool World – a land inhabited by cartoons – there's an object called the Golden Spike of Power, which balances both worlds. Holli Would (Basinger's character) wants the spike so she can turn human, but this may actually destroy both worlds. In a fairly standard platform adventure, Detective Frank Harris (Pitt's character) has to find five pieces of a map to the tunnel and find the spike so he can return it to where it belongs. The SNES version, meanwhile, is an adventure game in which you play as the cartoonist who created the Cool World. ■

FACT

The movie had a budget of $28 million and made a total of $14 million. Its creator was unhappy with the film: he wanted to make it R-rated but the studio refused.

COWBOY KID

Year	1992
Publisher	Romstar
Developer	Pixel

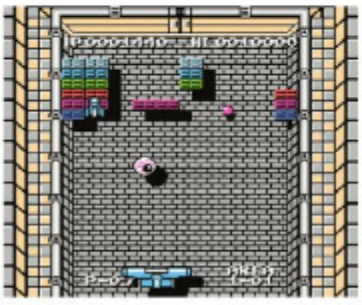
AN UNDERRATED ENTRY in the NES library, Cowboy Kid is a visually impressive action RPG set in the Wild West. Players control Sheriff Sam and (in two player games) his slightly politically incorrect Native American partner, Little Chief, as they try to bring justice to Villatown. A group of varmints known as the Scorpions have taken over the town and potentially killed Sam's father, so as sheriff – with Little Chief as his deputy – it's time for Sam to put them behind bars. Cowboy Kid is an accomplished game with large, endearing sprites, a catchy soundtrack and a handful of mini-games including Blackjack and a shooting gallery. Some would argue it deserves more recognition these days. ■

FACT

Despite the name Cowboy Kid, the game's front cover depicts a chap with a full moustache. Cowboy Man would have perhaps been more appropriate.

CRACKOUT

Year	1991
Publisher	Konami
Developer	Konami



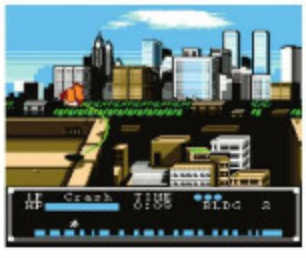
KONAMI'S ATTEMPT AT the Breakout-style 'ball-and-block' genre shares more similarities with Arkanoid than anything else. As in other games of its type, the aim is to destroy all the blocks in each of the 44 stages by bouncing the ball off your bat and trying to knock it in their direction. Much like Arkanoid there are a number of different power-ups, as well as enemies wandering around on the screen. Where this differs slightly, however, is that there are occasional boss battles which help break up the block-busting for a while. Released only in Europe, Australia and Japan (where it was called Block Break: The Mysterious Wall), Crackout is arguably one of the best games in the ball-and-block genre. ■

FACT

This is one of a number of early Konami games to include Konami Man, a superhero character who makes cameo appearances. Here he triggers a level warp.

CRASH 'N THE BOYS: STREET CHALLENGE

Year	1992
Publisher	Technos
Developer	Technos Japan



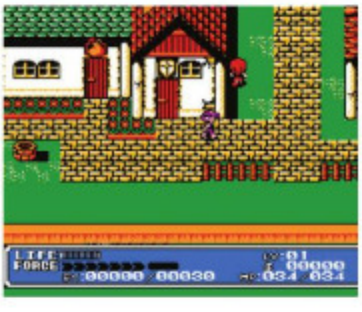
THERE MAY BE a number of multi-event 'sports' games on the NES, but this is the only one about class warfare. Crash Cooney and his 'boys' are students at Southside High, a school for children in working-class families. The students from the other three 'rich' schools challenge them to a no-holds-barred athletics competition, so the aim is to notch up a win for the working man. Well, working boy. The game consists of five events which are more violent than in normal athletics: the 400m Hurt-les, Hammer Throw Golf, Water Slaughter, Skyline Scramble and Judo. Between events you can visit the mall to buy sporting goods, health food and other items to improve your stats and give you a winning edge. ■

FACT

This is the fifth main game in the Kunio-kun series of games. Other entries that made it to the west in localised versions include River City Ransom, Super Dodge Ball and Nintendo World Cup.

CRYSTALIS

Year	1990
Publisher	SNK
Developer	SNK



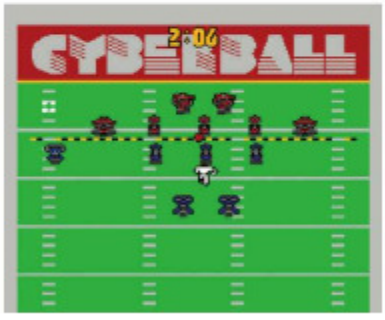
CRYSTALIS IS A game that was roundly ignored when it was originally released, but over the years has developed a cult following. Set 100 years after a Great War which ended civilisation, the game has a young magician who was frozen in ice during the war being thawed out in the hope he knows how to defeat Draygon, a new evil that threatens the world. It's a top-down action RPG similar to the original Legend Of Zelda, but it also borrows elements from the likes of Mega Man and Metroid thanks to the need to find four elemental swords: each of these has an ability that lets you access new areas, and is also strong (or weak) against specific major enemies. ■

FACT

Although not confirmed, it's claimed that Crystalis' story is influenced by the Studio Ghibli anime movie *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*.

CYBERBALL

Year 1992
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Jaleco



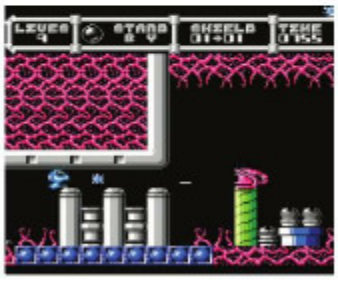
IN THE DISTANT future – the year 2015 – the American football league officially disbands due to an ongoing controversy with players getting surgery to replace their body parts with bionic machinery. The sport continues to be played underground until the International Cyberball League is formed in 2022, replacing all players with robots and introducing other rule changes, such as an exploding ball. Cyberball, then, is a futuristic take on American football where most of the same rules apply. However, instead of having four downs to gain 10 yards, you instead get five downs to 'defuse' the ball by running it over one of the defuse lines (the 50-yard line and the endzone), otherwise it blows up. ■

FACT

The NES version of Cyberball was originally going to be an unlicensed release by Tengen, but Jaleco eventually released the licensed version instead.

CYBERNOID: THE FIGHTING MACHINE

Year 1989
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Studio 12



THE PLANET EARTH has stored all its rare minerals and precious gems in three random, unassuming asteroids in the middle of an asteroid belt. Unfortunately, they weren't hidden well enough, and space pirates from the planet Zog have found them, stealing 'jillions of astralbucks' worth of loot. It's time for you to get it back, and you'll be doing it in the Cybernoid, a brand new state-of-the-art combat ship straight off the construction line. A side-scrolling shoot 'em up without any actual scrolling, Cybernoid instead offers three stages made up of numerous individual screens. While this does make things feel a little more static, it does allow for a more interesting journey in all directions instead of simply going from left to right. ■

FACT

The Cybernoid title screen says the ship was designed in 2117 by 'M. Sugden'. This is a reference to Molly Sugden, a popular British sitcom actress.

DANCE AEROBICS

Year 1989
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Human Entertainment

THE THIRD GAME released for the Power Pad floor mat, Dance Aerobics offers a series of exercises that involve dancing on the mat (in a way, it's a very early ancestor of arcade dance games like Dance Dance Revolution). There are three main modes: Dance Aerobics consists of eight progressively harder routines where you have to follow an on-screen trainer's steps, while Aerobic Studios is similar but lets you set a 5, 10, 15 or 20 minute workout. Rounding things off is Pad Antics, which offers a few mini-games that have you playing music on the mat or trying to place your hands and feet on the mat to match an on-screen diagram (similar to the party game Twister). ■

FACT

The Power Pad was Nintendo's first attempt to offer a fitness programme for its players. It wouldn't properly succeed with this until Wii Fit nearly two decades later.

DANNY SULLIVAN'S INDY HEAT

Year 1992
Publisher Tradewest
Developer Rare

A TOP-DOWN, SINGLE-SCREEN racing game that was a spiritual sequel to Ivan 'Ironman' Stewart's Super Off-Road. Starring American IndyCar hero Danny Sullivan, it features nine tracks with the aim being to continually finish first (otherwise you lose one of your three lives). Unlike many other arcade-style racers, Indy Heat features a pit system: if your car runs out of fuel and starts driving slowly, or if you damage it enough that it goes on fire, you have to steer into the pits so your crew can repair it and get you back into the race. The ninth and final stage, the Tradewest Speed Bowl, is based on the Indianapolis 500 race, though obviously licensing issues preventing it from being called that. ■

FACT

Danny Sullivan won the Indy 500 in 1985, and went on to win the 1988 CART Indy Car World Series. He tried F1 for a season but only got 2 points.

DARKMAN

Year 1991
Publisher Ocean
Developer Painting By Numbers

A PLATFORM GAME with an interesting twist based on the 1990 movie by Sam Raimi. Because the film is a superhero story about a scientist who can create synthetic skin to imitate his enemies, each of the game's five stages has you wearing a different 'mask', giving you a different set of abilities. Before each stage begins you have to try to take photographs of that level's boss, in order to get reference shots to make the mask. The better the photos, the better the quality of the mask you make and the more time you get to finish the level (because the synthetic skin disintegrates when it's exposed to light). A clever idea that adds variety to the gameplay, since you're essentially five different 'characters'. ■

FACT

Darkman is one of a number of R-rated movies in the 80s and early 90s (like *Rambo* and *A Nightmare On Elm Street*) that were marketed to children through action figures and video games.

DARKWING DUCK

Year 1992
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

CAPCOM'S OWNERSHIP OF the Disney licence continued in 1992 with this game based on the Saturday morning cartoon *Darkwing Duck*. A number of F.O.W.L. agents including the Liquidator, Quackerjack and Wolfduck have been looting parts of St Canard as part of a larger plan to seize control of the entire city, so special intelligence agency S.H.U.S.H. sends out the call for Darkwing Duck, their beak-wearing freelancer, to investigate. Much like DuckTales before it, Darkwing Duck plays like a modified version of Mega Man, with some differences: as well as the ability to jump and shoot like Mega Man, Darkwing can hang from ledges, and also has a cape shield which deflects attacks. ■

FACT

Darkwing's gas gun has special attacks that deplete his gas energy. The power-ups that refill it are energy canisters identical to those in Mega Man (except they have a G on them instead of an E).

DASH GALAXY IN THE ALIEN ASYLUM

Year 1990
Publisher Data East
Developer Beam Software

DASH GALAXY, FEARLESS space explorer, has landed on a dangerous alien planet and has to leave by navigating his way through the asylum's maze of rooms so he can reach his ship. The game consists of two different play styles: starting in the elevator shaft of each floor, you're given a top-down view and have to push blocks around to gain access to doors. When you enter a door the action switches to a side-scrolling platformer as you try to collect stars, bombs and keys. Although it's a relatively unique concept, the game was criticised for its sluggish momentum-based movement: despite his name, Dash takes a while to pick up speed and depending on how fast he's running his jumps are either extremely high and slow, or extremely low and fast. ■

FACT

Although the game's manual proudly declares that 'Data East brings you arcade realism at home', there never was a Dash Galaxy arcade game.

DAY DREAMIN' DAVEY

Year 1992
Publisher HAL Laboratory
Developer Sculptured Software

DAVEY IS A schoolboy with an overactive imagination. When he's at school it doesn't take much for him to start daydreaming and before he knows it he's off to Ancient Greece, the Old West or Medieval England. In this game, Davey goes into a daydream in order to resolve real-life incidents when he's at school. In an early example, the school bully Lumpy takes his pencil, so he daydreams that he's a knight trying to get back his lance (which conveniently looks like a giant pencil). Its witty concept only takes it so far though, and ultimately the game itself is a little underwhelming due to awkward collision detection and some serious flickering making some enemies hard to see. ■

FACT

In some bonus sections, Davey has to shoot a gun out of an enemy's hand. You can either use an on-screen cursor or the Zapper (if you were still using your Zapper in 1992).

DAYS OF THUNDER

Year 1990
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Beam Software

A RACING GAME based on Tony Scott's 1990 NASCAR-themed movie starring Tom Cruise. Playing as Cruise's character Cole Trickle, you have to try to win the Series Cup by taking on seven races and trying to finish top of the points leaderboard by the end. Although it's based on a Hollywood movie, the Days of Thunder game is actually fairly complex, and racing involves far more than just holding down the accelerator and dodging past opponents. You have to take your fuel, engine damage and tyre wear into account and regularly make pit stops. Once in the pits, you have full control of every element, from swapping tyres to repairing the engine and refuelling. This makes for a surprisingly difficult game. ■

FACT

While NASCAR would frown at such suggestions, the manual suggests that 'cutting off other cars, even bumping them aside, is a legitimate tactic in this game'.

DEADLY TOWERS

Year 1987
Publisher Broderbund
Developer Lenar

PART SIDE-SCROLLER, PART isometric, this action RPG puts you in the armour of Prince Myer, a young royal who's about to become crowned as king. Sitting by a lake and thinking about his future reign, the Prince is surprised when a shadowy spirit emerges from the lake, forms the shape of a man and tells him that the 'horrid devil of darkness' Rubas is planning to take over the land by building a castle nearby and using its magic bells to summon monsters. The aim is to visit Rubas' castle, climb each of its seven bell towers, kill the bosses there and destroy the magic bells. Deadly Towers is notorious for its enormous dungeons: there are 10 in total and each has a large number of screens (many have over 200). ■

FACT

Deadly Towers was originally supposed to be called Hell's Bells, but Nintendo of America said it wouldn't issue a Seal of Quality unless the name was changed.

DEFENDER II

Year 1988
Publisher HAL Laboratory
Developer HAL America

THE SEQUEL TO Williams Electronics' hugely popular Defender arcade game, Defender II for the most part plays similarly to its predecessor. Set in the year 7211, aliens have once again attacked the planet Ligaras meaning you have to head out in your trusty ship again and stop the residents from being abducted. While at first glance it looks almost identical to the first game in terms of its side-scrolling shooting and the ability to shoot aliens as they carry away humans (letting you catch the humans as they fall), there's one major addition: a stargate. Fly into this and you'll be teleported to the nearest abduction or falling human, letting you find and reach danger quickly before the abduction is complete. ■

FACT

The 1981 arcade version of Defender II was called Stargate, because Williams wasn't yet sure if it was still allowed to use the Defender name.

DEFENDER OF THE CROWN

Year 1989
Publisher Ultra Games
Developer Beam Software

THE YEAR IS 1149, the place is England and the status of the King's heart is 'not beating'. With the ruler dead, six lords are competing to replace him. Playing as a Saxon lord, your aim is to initially destroy the three Norman castles to the south and claim the crown. To do this you have to conquer lands and raid castles to earn money to build your army. As the game proceeds you're faced with a number of tasks, from taking part in jousting contests to rescuing damsels in distress, to getting in touch with Robin Hood to ask him for help. The result is a strategy game that's surprisingly deep and gained something of a cult following, with numerous fan-made remakes released over the years. ■

FACT

Also in 1989, the PC version of Defender of the Crown was the second computer game to ever be released on CD-ROM (after children's adventure game The Manhole).

DEFENDERS OF DYNATRON CITY

Year 1992
Publisher JVC
Developer Lucasfilm Games

JVC'S ACTION RPG had a lot of hype behind it. Defenders of Dynatron City was developed by Lucasfilm Games – before it became LucasArts – and its lead designer was Gary Winnick (co-creator of Maniac Mansion). Meanwhile, Sam & Max creator Steve Purcell wrote a six-issue comic series for Marvel while DIC Entertainment made an animated TV pilot for it. Safe to say, this game about a group of futuristic superheroes was supposed to take the world by storm. Ultimately though, the awkward controls and sloppy hit detection meant that rather than becoming the next X-Men, the likes of Ms Megawatt, Jet Headstrong, Monkey Kid and Radium Dog instead faded into obscurity and Lucasfilm Games moved on to bigger and better projects. ■

FACT

The animated TV pilot aired in February 1992 and included voice acting by Whoopi Goldberg and Tim Curry. Christopher Walken also provided a voice but it was replaced.

DEJA VU

Year 1990
Publisher Kemco
Developer ICOM Simulations

'YOU ARE WAKING from a stupor that feels like a chronic headache after a week in Vegas.' So begins Deja Vu, a point-and-click adventure set in the early 1940s. Playing as retired boxer turned private investigator Ace Harding, you begin the game by waking up in a public restroom with blood on your hand (we've all been there) and have to clear your name for the murder you're about to be framed for. Deja Vu was originally released on the Macintosh as the first in a series of four 'MacVenture' games designed to have a windows-based appearance similar to the Mac's operating system. When it was ported over to the NES this design was changed a little, but the general idea of using windows to navigate remained. ■

FACT

The US version was censored to fit Nintendo's acceptable content guidelines. A glass of scotch on the Japanese version's title screen was replaced with some coins, and most dead bodies had their blood removed.

DEMON SWORD

Year 1990
Publisher Taito
Developer Tose

MANY GAMES OF this era used the usual 'an evil force has taken over a land so it's up to the hero to save the day' storyline, but Demon Sword's plot is so half-hearted that the evil force in question here is simply referred to as 'a dark fiend'. Mind you, it's perhaps understandable given that the hero's name is Victar. Victar owns the rusted old hilt of a legendary sword, so he has to travel across the land to find the broken pieces of its blade so he can kill his generically-named foe. Demon Sword was changed significantly for its western release: the Japanese version featured 13 stages compared to the North America's seven, and while the western release gave you a health bar the Japanese one had one-hit kills. ■

FACT

Although the box art for Demon Sword shows a Conan-style warrior, the actual sprite wears a red kimono. That's because it's untouched from the Japanese version, where the hero is Japanese.

DESERT COMMANDER

Year 1989
Publisher Kemco
Developer Kemco

ALTHOUGH NINTENDO STARTED its series of turn-based tactical games – known among fans as Nintendo Wars – way back in 1988 with Famicom Wars, gamers in the west didn't get a taste of it until Advance Wars (the seventh game) was released in 2001. That doesn't mean the NES didn't have similar strategy games, however. Desert Commander is based on the North African conflict in the Second World War , and players can choose between playing as the Allied Forces and the Axis Powers. At least, that's the case in the Japanese Famicom version. For the NES localisation, all references to the Second World War were removed – presumably because a game in which you get to play as the Nazis isn't ideal – and the factions became anonymous. ■

FACT

Although the North American version makes no mention of the Second World War's North African theatre, the last of the game's five available scenarios is still called 'North African Front'.

DESTINATION EARTHSTAR

Year 1990
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Imagineering

AS FAR AS plots go, Destination Earthstar has an interesting one. Two hundred years ago, a group of humans were kidnapped by an alien race called the Kojans and brought back to their planet as slaves. As generations passed, the Kojans gave humans rights and privileges, so you're chosen to fly back to Earth as an ambassador to find out more about your ancestors. The problem is, there are eight star systems between your planet and Earth, and they're riddled with space pirates. Cue a shoot 'em up played with two different viewpoints: from inside the cockpit, firing at approaching enemies as you approach an enemy base station, then as a more traditional side-scrolling shooter as you try to bring the station down. ■

FACT

Don't let the plot excite you too much: when you finish the game you simply get a message saying: 'The people of Earth welcome you home again.'

DESTINY OF AN EMPEROR

Year 1990
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

KOEI MAY HAVE been the game studio best known for its video games based on *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, but the fourteenth-century Chinese novel was also (loosely) interpreted by Capcom in this strategy RPG. Starting off with three warlords – Liu Bei, Zhang Fei and Guan Yu – you can then recruit new warlords to join your party as you progress. Whereas most other RPGs have you fighting random battles against standard enemies, in Destiny of an Emperor you'll regularly come across other warlords and fight them too. When you defeat one there's a chance they may ask to join your group, but you eventually have to get picky: while there are 150 warlords in the game, you can only befriend a maximum of 70. ■

FACT

Romance of the Three Kingdoms is ideal if you fancy some light holiday reading: it's 800,000 words long and introduces nearly 1,000 characters over 120 chapters.

DEVIL WORLD

Year 1987
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1

A RARE EXAMPLE of a first-party Nintendo game being released in Europe, but not in North America. Devil World is a slightly more elaborate take on Pac-Man: playing as a green dragon called Tamagon, you have to escape the Devil World by getting through each maze. Depending on the stage, this could involve eating dots (but you can only eat them while carrying a cross) or collecting bibles and placing them into a holy seal. While all this is going on, the 'Devil', standing at the top of the screen, gestures in random directions for his minions to scroll the screen, potentially trapping you against a wall. Because of its use of religious iconography, Nintendo of America decided not to release Devil World in North America. ■

FACT

The Devil did eventually make it to America as an assist trophy in the Wii, Wii U and 3DS Smash Bros games, where he appears and moves the stage to the side.

DICK TRACY

Year 1990
Publisher Bandai
Developer Realtime Associates

TO COINCIDE WITH the *Dick Tracy* movie starring Warren Beatty and Madonna, a bunch of different Dick Tracy games were released for various systems. While the NES game used some of the imagery from the film (including the iconic logo showing Beatty in silhouette), the game itself is based more on the comic strip with a total of 15 villains included, many of whom were never in the movie. The game's split between driving and side-scrolling sections as Tracy tries to find out which criminals are responsible for certain crimes. In an interesting twist, the player has to follow the letter of the law: if you shoot an unarmed thug instead of punching him, you lose health (the real Dick Tracy wouldn't stoop so low). ■

FACT

There's a bizarre Super Punch power-up where punching enemies sends them spinning along the stage, taking out other enemies like a Koopa Troopa shell.

DIE HARD

Year 1992
Publisher Activision
Developer Pack-In Video

THE BEST CHRISTMAS movie that isn't about Christmas has been immortalised in video game form a number of times over the years, including this NES take. As in the movie, John McClane has to rescue his wife and other hostages from the Nakatomi Plaza building by defeating terrorist leader Hans Gruber. It's a top-down action game with a couple of interesting gimmicks, including a 'foot health' meter. The more you run or walk over broken glass, the slower you get. It also makes sure McClane has no advantages over his enemies by deliberately blacking out areas of the screen that are out of his line of sight. This is a big difference from other top-down games, where the entire play area is usually visible. ■

FACT

Die Hard has four different endings, depending on whether you called the police earlier in the game and whether you kept the detonators to stop the roof exploding.

DIG DUG II: TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Year 1989
Publisher Bandai
Developer Namco

WHILE THE ORIGINAL Dig Dug game is considered an arcade classic and regularly features on Namco's numerous arcade compilations, its sequel has been widely forgotten over time. No longer set in underground caves, Dig Dug II instead takes place on a tropical paradise. The aim is still to kill all the enemies to move on to the next level, but now you have a new trick up your sleeve. While you can still use your pump, as in the first game, to inflate your enemies and make them explode, you can also now use your drill to break up pieces of land and make them collapse into the sea. This can kill a number of enemies at once: or you, if you aren't careful. ■

FACT

Although the hero in the Dig Dug games is officially called Taizo Hori, at this point he was still simply referred to as Dig Dug in the game's manual.

DIGGER T. ROCK: THE LEGEND OF THE LOST CITY

Year 1990
Publisher Milton Bradley
Developer Rare

DIGGER T. ROCK is a spelunker who likes nothing better than digging through underground caves in search of hidden wonders. One day he finds a sign pointing downwards towards a 'Lost City'. Keen to see whether it exists, Digger decides his mission is to explore further into the cave to try and find this mysterious city. This is a 2D platformer with similarities to Boulder Dash and Spelunker, in which Digger is armed with a number of different tools to help him dig through each stage. As well as his trusty shovel, players can collect rocks to throw at enemies, as well as rope ladders and dynamite to help him escape certain tricky areas. Digger T. Rock was re-released on Rare Replay for the Xbox One. ■

FACT

The game ends with Digger arriving at the Lost City, and a 'to be continued' message. At the time of writing, it never has been.

DIRTY HARRY

Year 1990
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Gray Matter

ANOTHER NES GAME based on a movie considered far too violent for children, Dirty Harry has you playing as Clint Eastwood's legendary police detective Harry Callaghan as he tries to bring down a drug kingpin known as The Anaconda. Fighting your way through the streets, sewers, waterfront and finally Alcatraz, you have to defeat San Francisco's drug gangs while destroying their weapon and drug stashes. While it's only loosely based on the films – at no point in the five movies does Harry find himself jumping on snakes' heads in a crack den – it does feature some impressive voice sampling, including a full 20-second clip of his famous 'do ya feel lucky punk' routine when you finish the game. ■

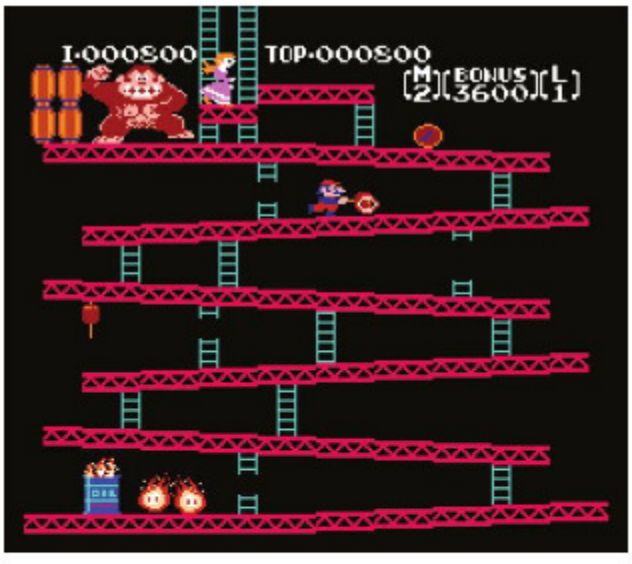
FACT

Further noting its audio expertise, Dirty Harry is the only NES game to credit its composers on the back of the box.

DONKEY KONG

Year 1986
Publisher Nintendo
Developers Nintendo R&D1, Intelligent Systems

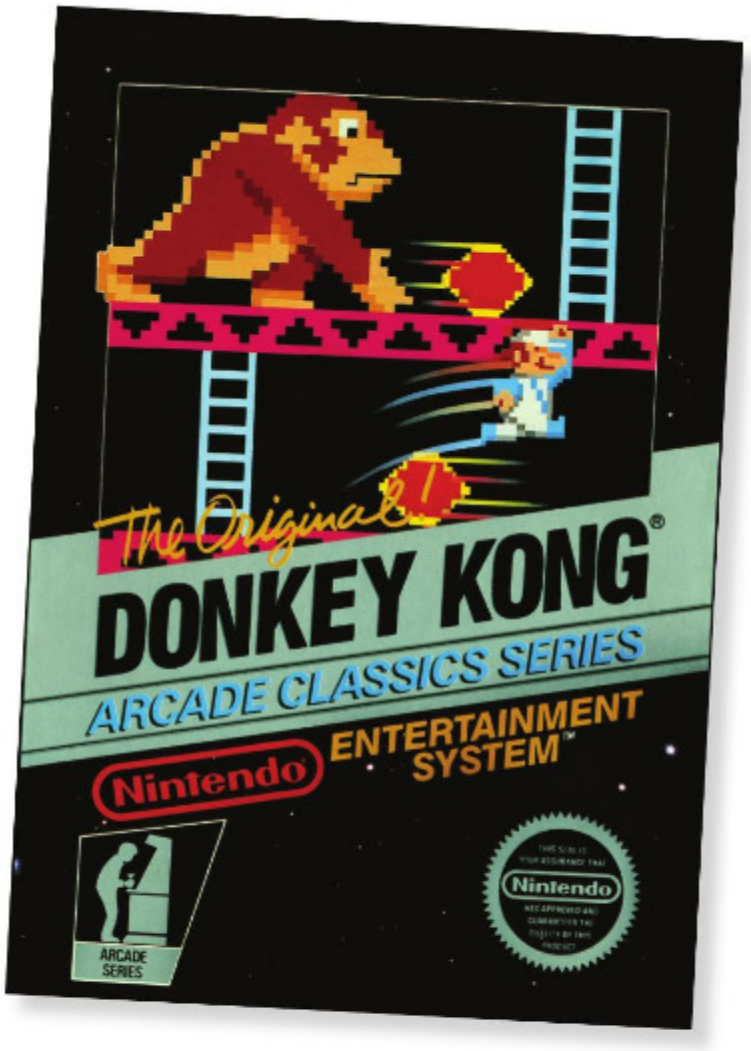
THERE ARE FEW games more important to Nintendo's history than Donkey Kong. Had it not been for the struggling toy company's decision to let Shigeru Miyamoto and Gunpei Yokoi convert its failing Radar Scope arcade machines into something more appealing, Nintendo may very well have bowed out of the video game market and we'd never have had the NES, SNES or anything after that (not even this book, which would have been the real tragedy).



If it's somehow passed you by, Donkey Kong is the story of a giant ape, who captures a young woman called Pauline and climbs to the top of a building site with her. Her heroic boyfriend Mario sets out to rescue her by making his way to the top of the structure, with the aim being to loosen the bolts at the top and send the angry ape plummeting to his doom.

Because of the huge success of Donkey Kong when it made its arcade debut in 1981, it was inevitable that Nintendo would release ports of the game on its eventual home console. It wasn't an arcade-perfect conversion, though: because storage space was limited on early NES cartridges, Nintendo wasn't able to include all four levels from the arcade version. As a result, the second level – nicknamed the 'pie factory' stage because it consists of conveyor belts moving piles of sand that look like apple pies – was removed entirely from the NES version, reducing the total number of levels from four to three.

That's not to say it wasn't still a strong port, though. Because these were the days before Nintendo kept its characters and IP on its own consoles, Donkey Kong was already available on a host of other systems, including the Atari 2600, Colecovision, Intellivision and Commodore 64. Many of these versions were also missing stages, and all of them were graphically inferior to the NES version, which was as close to arcade perfect as you could get at the time, given the limitations of home gaming.



In 2010 Nintendo decided to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Super Mario Bros. by releasing a red Wii in Europe which contained a built-in Virtual Console game, Donkey Kong: Original Edition. This newly updated version of the NES game finally added the pie factory level, along with the animation of Donkey Kong grabbing Pauline and climbing up the ladder at the end of each level. The Wii version of Original Edition was never made available outside of these limited edition EU consoles, though it did eventually come to the 3DS Virtual Console in Japan and North America through special 'buy game X and get this free' deals. In 2014 it came to the 3DS eShop in Europe and Australia, where at the time of writing it remains the only way you can currently buy it. ■

FACT

The NES version of Donkey Kong included new title screen music, composed by Yukio Kaneoka, which would eventually become known among Nintendo gamers as the Donkey Kong theme despite not appearing in the arcade original. Donkey Kong Country on the SNES opens with Cranky Kong (the ape from the original Donkey Kong) playing this theme on a gramophone.

DONKEY KONG JR

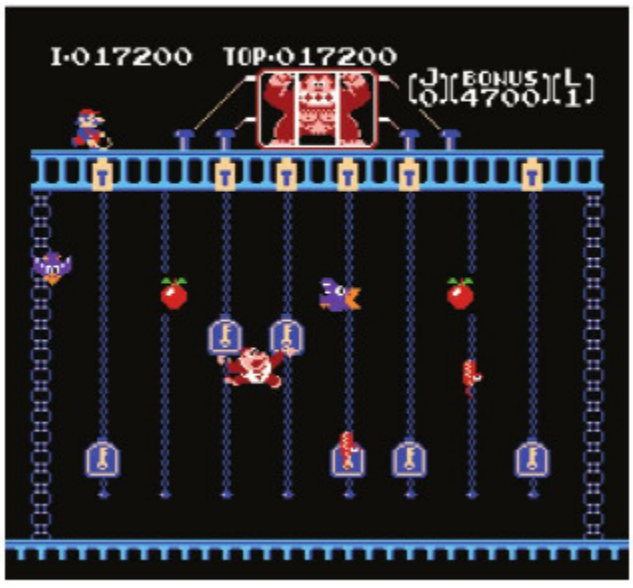
Year 1986
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1

DONKEY KONG WAS a phenomenon in arcades so a sequel was a no-brainer. Rather than simply offering more levels though, Donkey Kong Jr turns the tables entirely by making Mario the bad guy. After defeating the titular ape in Donkey Kong, Mario's imprisoned the big lunk in a cage, meaning it's up to his son to come after him and save the day by unlocking the cage and sending Mario plummeting to his doom. Hang on, that sounds familiar.

The main mechanic in this sequel is Donkey Kong Jr's ability to climb vines. Not only does this let him get around, he can also knock off the fruit that hangs on these vines and drop it onto unsuspecting enemies below. As in the original game, the player can only fall a very short distance before dying, so using these vines to navigate each stage is essential.

The extra complexities of the climbing controls – you can grab two vines at the same time, which lets you climb up quicker but down slower – mean Donkey Kong Jr is initially a trickier game to get to grips with than its predecessor was, but many who got over this initial hurdle believe this second game is superior.

While the NES version of Donkey Kong was missing a stage, that isn't the case with the sequel: all four levels of the arcade game are present here, making the NES port easily the best home version at the time without question. ■



FACT

The Colecovision version of Donkey Kong Jr was supposed to have a bonus level set in a bakery, with Mario trying to drop pies on Jr's head. Coleco was forced to remove the level after Nintendo took issue with it taking liberties with the licence.

DONKEY KONG 3

Year 1986
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1

THE BLACK SHEEP in the Donkey Kong family, the third game in the series is more of a shoot 'em up than a platformer. This time the player controls Stanley, a pest exterminator who's a bit annoyed that Donkey Kong is hiding in his greenhouse. Donkey Kong is hanging from two vines, and the aim is to continuously spray him with your bug spray to force him off the top of the screen while also shooting the bugs that fly around and attack you as he disturbs them.

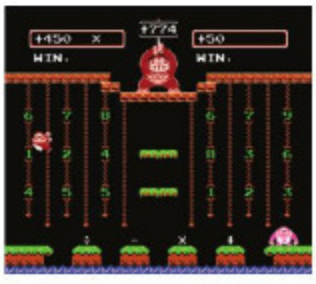
The repetitive gameplay and the lack of 'spark' that made the previous games such a smash hit – not to mention the lack of Mario – meant Donkey Kong 3 was only modestly received and Stanley went into early retirement. ■

FACT

Hudson Soft made a strange sequel to Donkey Kong 3 for Japanese computers, which featured 20 levels set in the likes of a UFO, a pyramid and an active volcano.

DONKEY KONG JR MATH

Year 1986
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D2



THIS WAS AN early attempt by Nintendo to make education fun for children by making a mathematics game with the Donkey Kong Jr engine. Players were shown a number by Donkey Kong and had to reach that total by collecting numbers and addition, subtraction, multiplication and division symbols. While the intent was noble – it was supposed to be the video game equivalent of crushing pills into your sick child's ice cream so they'd eat it – there was a slight problem in that the game wasn't actually fun. Although the box said it was part of the 'Education Series' (implying more were to come), Nintendo quickly decided that maybe 'edutainment' wasn't the road to go down and went back to making games about jumping on things' heads instead. ■

FACT

During the NES's run Nintendo teamed up with Sharp to make the Sharp Nintendo Television, a TV with a built-in NES. The Japanese version of this, the My Computer TV C1, came with a 2 in 1 cartridge containing Donkey Kong Jr and Donkey Kong Jr Math.

DONKEY KONG CLASSICS

Year 1988
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo

NINTENDO MADE A handful of multi-game cartridges (see the end of this section), but these were mostly created to be bundled with NES consoles. For example, a Super Mario Bros. / Duck Hunt cartridge was included with the NES Action Set, which came with a Zapper gun. Donkey Kong Classics was the only multi-game cartridge that was released by Nintendo for retail sale, rather than as part of a system bundle. It contains both Donkey Kong and Donkey Kong Jr, both unchanged from their standalone NES releases. 'This double dose of monkey business will have you rolling in the aisles,' reads the game box, unaware that this phrase only works with cinema, theatre or anything else that has aisles. Nintendo knew games, but it didn't know interior design. ■

FACT

Saturday Supercade, a cartoon show that ran in the US in 1983–84, included a bunch of short animated segments based on arcade games. These included Donkey Kong and Donkey Kong Jr.

DOUBLE DARE

Year 1990
Publisher GameTek
Developer Rare

DOUBLE DARE WAS a children's game show that aired on Nickelodeon from 1986 to 1993. This NES version is faithful to the TV version, right down to the chance to win prizes in the final event, the obstacle course. Players control a team of two children and are given two rounds with 10 questions in each. If a player doesn't know the answer to a question they can Dare their opponent to answer it, but they can then Double Dare it back. If they do, the player can instead choose a 'physical challenge', which involves one of eight different mini-games. These include the questionable 'Pie in Your Pants', in which your partner throws pies at you and you have to catch them in your trousers. ■

FACT

The final Obstacle Course stage has you waggling the D-Pad side to side or up and down for each obstacle. 'Prizes' include a holiday, a BMX bike and even an NES.

DOUBLE DRAGON

Year 1988
Publisher Tradewest
Developer Technos Japan

WHEN PEOPLE THINK of side-scrolling beat 'em ups they usually think of one of three games, depending on their past experiences: Streets Of Rage, Final Fight or Double Dragon. Technos' iconic arcade brawler – about brothers Billy and Jimmy Lee heading out to rescue Billy's girlfriend from an evil gang – was released in arcades in 1987 and came to the NES the following year. Rather than a direct port, however, the NES Double Dragon has a number of differences that make it feel almost like a completely separate game. Each of the 10 stages (spread out over four 'missions') is laid out completely differently from the arcade version, and players can also learn new moves as they progress in a primitive sort of 'levelling up' system. While this 'new' adventure was a positive for arcade fans, however, the limitations of the NES mean it has its drawbacks too. Nintendo's console isn't able to handle more than two enemies on-screen at the same time, and they have to both be the same character. This also means the arcade version's two-player co-op mode is missing, since the entire game would have consisted of two-on-one battles. To Technos' credit, it made lemonade from these technically limiting lemons by adding a twist to the story: whereas Jimmy Lee is the Player two character in the arcade version, here it emerges he's actually the Shadow Boss, the final boss in the game. This would be more of a shock if the game's manual didn't reveal this. ■

FACT

A terrible *Double Dragon* movie hit cinemas in 1994. It was set in 'New Angeles' and starred Alyssa Milano as Billy's girlfriend, and Robert Patrick (aka the T-1000) as the main villain.

DOUBLE DRAGON II: THE REVENGE

Year 1990
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Technos Japan

DECIDING TO COMPLETELY ignore the massive twist in the first Double Dragon, the sequel pretends Jimmy Lee was never the leader of the evil Black Shadow Warrior gang and that he and his brother Billy have always been best pals. This time Billy's girlfriend has actually been killed, so it's time to avenge her death. Double Dragon II has a number of notable differences over the original game: two-player simultaneous co-op is now available (hence Jimmy's return) and the levelling-up system has been scrapped: you now have all your moves at the beginning of the game. Other than the first level, the NES version is completely different from the arcade version of Double Dragon II, with entirely new stages and a different final boss. ■

FACT

If you beat the game on its hardest 'Supreme Master' difficulty setting, an angel comes down and brings Billy's girlfriend back to life. As you do.

DOUBLE DRAGON III: THE SACRED STONES

Year 1991
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Technos Japan

AFTER DYING THEN coming back to life, Marion – Billy Lee's girlfriend – has disappeared for the third time. A soothsayer called Hiruko explains that the only way to get her back is to find the three Sacred Stones and bring them to the kidnappers. Double Dragon III takes on a more international feel with stages set in the US, China, Japan, Italy and Egypt. The big change this time, however, is the removal of the normal 'lives' system. Billy and Jimmy only have one life each, but later in the game you can add two other characters – Chinese martial artist Chin and Japanese ninja Ranzou – to your party. You can switch between each character, essentially giving you more lives. ■

FACT

When you start a two-player game the intro refers to 'Bimmy and Jimmy'. As a tribute to this typo, 2012 reboot Double Dragon Neon has bosses called Bimmy and Jammy.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE

Year 1987
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

THE FIRST BASKETBALL game to be released on the NES, Double Dribble remained one of the most popular throughout the system's life. It's a port of Konami's arcade game of the same name, and offers full 5-on-5 basketball on a scrolling court. For its age, Double Dribble plays a remarkably authentic game of basketball, and its presentation is impressive too. Games start with the Star Spangled Banner playing as the crowd enters the arena, sampled speech is present (even though it isn't much more than a chap saying 'Double Dribble' on the title screen) and there's even a half-time show with cheerleaders and dancing mascots. Performing jump shots near the basket triggers a brilliantly detailed cut-scene in which your player performs one of three dunks, the likes of which had never been seen in sports games at the time. Despite its flashy appearance, however, it wasn't without its flaws: there were numerous areas on the court where three-point shots were almost guaranteed to go in (such as the extreme top corners of the screen), meaning two players who had mastered this exploit would end up playing playing something very different to the traditional style of basketball intended. Much like many sports games in the '80s it was also limited in terms of content: there were only four teams to choose from and you could only play exhibition games, with no league or tournament modes available. All this aside, it remains a playable and entertaining game to this day. ■

FACT

One episode of TV show *Family Guy* showed Peter playing Double Dribble and exploiting the three-point glitch. The gameplay footage was taken from a YouTube video: that video was then removed by Fox for showing copyrighted *Family Guy* content.

DR. CHAOS

Year 1988
Publisher FCI
Developer Marionette

WHEN YOUR BROTHER is a physics genius who experiments with warp zones, you've got to be prepared for the likelihood that something might happen to him. That's what's happened to Michael, whose brother – Dr. Ginn Chaos – has been missing for three months. Heading to the doc's house, Michael discovers that it's full of creatures and warp zones. Time to figure out what's going on, then. Dr. Chaos is similar to Goonies II in that it consists of side-scrolling platforming sections and first-person room exploration sections. In the latter you can come across warp zones that make enormous monsters appear: if this happens you're sent back to the side-scrolling stage where you have to defeat the hefty beast before you're able to continue. ■

FACT

Sometimes a game's ending doesn't need to be dramatic, it just needs to be rewarding. When you beat this game you're reunited with your brother and a message simply reads: 'Congratulations! You are great.'

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

Year 1989
Publisher Bandai
Developer Advance Communication Company

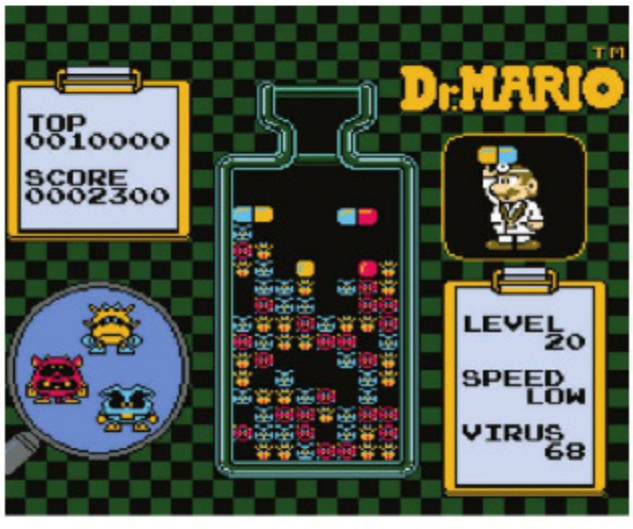
DR. JEKYLL'S GETTING married! There's just one problem: between his house and the church are countless enemies and obstacles all seemingly out to ruin his day, and if he gets too angry he'll transform into the evil Mr. Hyde. As Dr. Jekyll, you must travel from left to right avoiding enemies. As you take damage your anger meter rises: when it's full you'll turn into Mr. Hyde and you'll play a mirrored, auto-scrolling version of the same stage. You have to destroy enough demons (using your 'psycho wave') to turn back before reaching the point you reached with Dr. Jekyll, otherwise you die. It's an interesting idea let down by awkward controls and the high difficulty level of the Dr. Jekyll sections. ■

FACT

The game's enemies include Murphy – a sleeping dog who wakes up and attacks you – and Rachel, a beautiful widow who attacks you because you look like her late husband.

DR. MARIO

Year 1990
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1



ALTHOUGH MARIO HAD made appearances in other non-platforming games before this point – including the likes of Wrecking Crew, Pinball and Alleyway – Dr. Mario was the first 'proper' Mario-themed spin-off, opening the door to an eventual world of karting, sports and party games. In it, Mario – who, let's just assume, has had the 11+ years of training required to become a qualified doctor – is now working in the virus research lab at the Mushroom Kingdom Hospital, but something's gone wrong. According to Nurse Toadstool, one of the experiments has gone out of control and the viruses are spreading quickly. As luck would have it, Mario's developed a new vitamin that should deal with them, so it's up to the player to help him out. The game takes place inside a big jar, where a number of viruses are lingering at the bottom. Mario regularly tosses pills into the jar, each of which are split into two colours. You have to rotate and arrange the pills as they fall so their colours match up. Match up four or more in a row and they'll disappear, but the aim is to include a virus in the group, because it'll disappear along with the pills. Each level is complete, then, when every virus is removed. There's also a two-player mode, where players compete to clear their bottle of viruses first: getting combos forces random pills to slowly drop down your opponent's screen, holding up their progress. ■

FACT

Nintendo released a set of Dr. Mario Valentine's Day Cards in 1990. One showed Dr. Mario in an ambulance with the message 'I rushed right over to say, won't you be my valentine?'. Which seems like misuse of a hospital vehicle.

DRAGON POWER

Year 1988
Publisher Bandai
Developer Tose

GOKU AND HIS companion Nora are on a mission to find seven crystal balls. If they manage to find all seven, the Dragon Emperor will grant them a wish. If this feels a little familiar to you, that's because Dragon Power is actually a Dragon Ball game modified for North America to have the Dragon Ball licence removed. Whereas in Japan it's known as Dragon Ball: Shenlong no Nazo (Shenlong's Riddle), in America the general plot is the same but many names have been changed: Goku remains the same but Bulma, Tamcha, Oolong and Pilaf become Nora, Lancer, Pudgy and King Minos respectively. Want to use Goku's famous Kamehameha energy attack? Go for it, but now it's called the Wind Wave. And it isn't Dragon Balls you're looking for, it's Crystal Balls. Character renaming and sprite modifications aside, the game plays similarly to the licensed version: it's a Zelda-style top-down adventure (with occasional side-on battle sections) where you make your way through ten stages fighting various enemies while eating food to keep your power topped up (it decreases as you get hungrier). The story resembles the Dragon Ball plot, but there are some changes: in the questionable scene where Bulma/Nora is asked to show her underwear in return for a Dragon Ball, instead she's asked for a sandwich. A couple of years later the game made it to France, but this time it did have the Dragon Ball licence, and was named Dragon Ball: Le Secret du Dragon. ■

FACT

Although numerous other Dragon Ball games were released in Europe, North America didn't get an official one until Dragon Ball GT: Final Bout hit the PlayStation in 1997, and even then only 10,000 copies were initially released.

DRAGON FIGHTER

Year 1992
Publisher Sofel
Developer Natsume

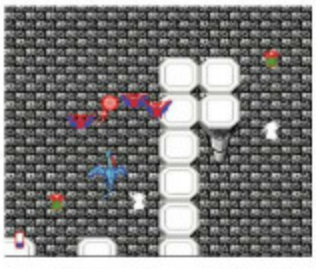
EAGER TO WIN the 'strangest name for a villain in an NES fantasy adventure' award, Dragon Fighter tells the story of an 'envious and malicious warlock' called Zabbaong. Jealous of the thriving community and charitable nature of the people of Baljing, Zabbaong and his monsters set the place ablaze. In the middle of Baljing, though, is a statue of a warrior, and as luck would have it the Dragon Spirit – who protects the land – fires lightning at it, turning it into the game's hero. Cue a side-scrolling action platformer where you, as the Dragon Fighter, have to battle through six stages to defeat Zabbaong. The twist is, after killing enough enemies you can transform into a flying dragon and fly around causing havoc. ■

FACT

If Zabbaong is one of the worst villain names ever, the boss for the game's fifth level may have one of the best: the Discorporeal Skeleton.

DRAGON SPIRIT: THE NEW LEGEND

Year 1990
Publisher Bandai
Developer Namco



DRAGON SPIRIT WAS originally an arcade game released in 1987. The New Legend is an NES 'sequel' which is still based on the arcade version but makes a number of changes. Playing as Lace, the son of the arcade game's hero, you have to save your sister Iris from new bad guy Galda. Like its coin-op counterpart, it's a vertical-scrolling shoot 'em up in which you ride a large dragon which spits fireballs at your enemies. The NES version, however, has a different look and feel: your dragon is smaller and moves faster – making the game a little easier – and with fewer enemies and more power-ups, it's a more laid-back experience than the significantly more difficult original arcade version. ■

FACT

The game's prologue stage determines which difficulty level you play. If you beat it you get a blue dragon and play on Normal difficulty, but if you die you ride a gold dragon on Easy difficulty, which ends after only six stages.

DRAGON WARRIOR

Year 1989
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Chunsoft

WHILE THE FINAL Fantasy games are the most popular JRPGs in the west, in Japan it's the Dragon Quest series that's always sold the most (1.5 million copies for the first game alone). Dragon Warrior, then, is the western version of Dragon Quest. Being the first game in the series, its plot is fairly basic: the evil Dragonlord has stolen magical balls of light and plunged the realm of Alefgard into darkness, so as a descendant of the legendary warrior Erdrick you have to get them back. In a clever twist, when you eventually reach the Dragonlord you're asked if you want to side with him: if you do he puts you to sleep and the game freezes. That's what you get for being evil. ■

FACT

Nintendo Power magazine offered Dragon Warrior to new subscribers to try to build interest in the series. Nearly half a million new subscribers took the offer, and employees were given shirts saying 'I survived the 1990 Dragon Warrior mailing.'

DRAGON WARRIOR II

Year 1990
Publisher Enix
Developer Chunsoft

SET 100 YEARS after the events of the first game, Dragon Warrior II stars a descendant of the previous hero. Your quest is to defeat the evil wizard Hargon, who wants to summon a demon and destroy the world. This sequel greatly expands on its predecessor by providing a much larger game map and introducing a party system. Whereas the first game was a solo quest that strictly consisted of one-on-one battles, this time you're eventually joined by two of your cousins, which allows for team battles against numerous enemies at a time. Although the first game was a success in Japan, it was Dragon Warrior II that really kicked off the series' astronomical popularity, with around 2.4 million copies sold in its native country. ■

FACT

Dragon Quest I & II were later remade for the Super Famicom, using the Dragon Quest V engine. This remake then became a Game Boy Color de-make, which was an 8-bit port of the enhanced version. If that makes sense.

DRAGON WARRIOR III

Year 1992
Publisher Enix
Developer Chunsoft

AFTER TWO GAMES playing as descendants of the fabled hero Erdrick, Dragon Warrior III is a prequel in which it's eventually revealed that you're playing as Erdrick himself (or herself: you can choose your hero's gender). Accompanied by up to three companions, you set out to stop the evil Baramos from destroying the world, but is he actually acting on behalf of an evil greater power? (Yes.) Once again the previous game is built upon further with more new features: there's now a class system, meaning you can recruit the likes of Soldiers, Pilgrims, Fighters and 'Goof-offs' to your party. You can also add and remove party members, and a new day/night cycle affects which characters and quests you can encounter. ■

FACT

In Japan, each Dragon Quest game sold more copies than the one before it (3.8 million this time), but in the US the opposite was true. Dragon Warrior III sold around 95,000 copies, compared to around 150,000 for the second game.

DRAGON WARRIOR IV

Year 1992
Publisher Enix
Developer Chunsoft

THE FOURTH DRAGON Warrior has nothing to do with the first three games, and is its own standalone adventure. It's split into five distinct chapters: the first four follow separate characters, while the fifth brings them all together as (non-playable) companions of the actual hero. Because in this final chapter you're only able to issue commands to your hero – unlike other party-based RPGs, where you can tell each character what to do – a new option called Tactics is introduced. This essentially lets you choose the strategy your four AI-controlled partners will follow during battles: for example, this could be all-out offence, choosing not to use magic (when doing so is dangerous), or the odd 'Try Out' tactic, which results in a completely random move each time. ■

FACT

The game's merchant Taloon (known as Torneko in Japan) starred in a spin-off dungeon-crawling game. It was to become the first game in Chunsoft's Mystery Dungeon series, which later had numerous Final Fantasy and Pokémon versions.

DRAGON'S LAIR

Year 1990
Publisher CSG Imagesoft / Elite Systems
Developer MotiveTime

FEW ARCADE GAMES were are visually groundbreaking as 1983's Dragon's Lair, which was actually a fully animated cartoon running off a laserdisc inside the cabinet. There was no way a home console could handle that – at least not until the dawn of CD-ROM – so the NES port seven years later was instead a completely different game. The plot's the same: Dirk the Daring has to rescue Princess Daphne from the evil dragon Singe – but rather than a video with a series of quick time events, it's a 2D platformer consisting of seven stages. Unfortunately, the clunky controls, sluggish pace and extremely high difficulty level mean Dragon's Lair is considered one of the worst games on the NES. ■

FACT

The European version of the game was tweaked before release in an attempt to improve things. It runs faster and it's more responsive, but was made even harder with new hazards added.

DROPZONE

Year 1992
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Eurocom

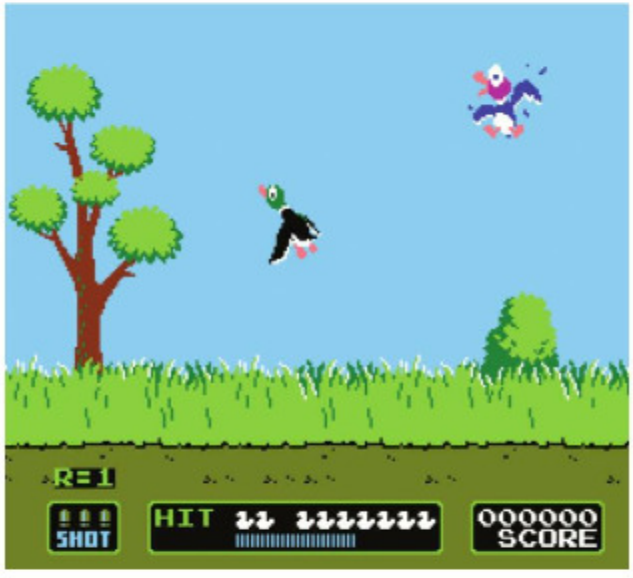
ORIGINALLY CREATED BY British developer Archer MacLean (also known for IK+ and Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker) for the Atari 800, Dropzone is a side-on shooter that's heavily inspired by Defender to the extent that it's basically the same game with a few notable differences. Firstly, your ship is replaced with a spaceman in a jetpack, meaning when you don't move your character's thrusters turn off and he slowly falls towards the ground. Secondly, instead of simply protecting humans from capture you have to collect them and place them in a 'dropzone'. Finally, rather than swooping down and grabbing humans, the game's enemies instead drop off androids (essentially red-coloured humans) which have to be shot. One of the better Europe-only NES games. ■

FACT

Publisher US Gold released the other versions of Dropzone and stopped paying MacLean royalties after 18 months, claiming it wasn't selling any more (it was). MacLean settled with them out of court and bought a Ferrari with the money.

DUCK HUNT

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1



DUCK HUNT WAS originally Beam Gun: Duck Hunt, a 1976 toy that projected the image of a duck onto your wall and challenged you to shoot it with a provided light gun. When the NES launched nearly a decade later alongside its Zapper gun accessory, Nintendo decided to resurrect Duck Hunt as the game designed to show off what it could do. The NES version has three game modes: Game A gives you a series of 10 ducks, appearing one at a time, and gives you three shots each to take them out. If you to shoot a certain number of ducks you'll progress to the next level. Game B is similar except the ducks come two at a time, while Game C replaces the ducks with clay pigeons, which are much smaller but move in a more predictable direction. While there isn't really much more to it than that, Duck Hunt remains one of the NES's most memorable games, partly because most people with a Zapper owned it, and partly because of the infamous dog. When you a shoot a duck your dog appears from the tall grass, proudly showing off your catch. If you miss, however, the dog starts laughing at you. The arcade version, Vs Duck Hunt, let you get your own back by shooting the dog, but he became such a cult figure that he actually became a playable character in Super Smash Bros. for Wii U and 3DS. ■

FACT

Because it was bundled with most NES systems that included a Zapper gun, it's estimated that more than 25 million copies of Duck Hunt ended up in people's homes.

DUCKTALES

Year	1989
Publisher	Capcom
Developer	Capcom

OF THE MORE than 35 games released on the NES by Capcom, DuckTales was easily the biggest seller. Around 1.67 million NES players owned its platforming take on the Disney Saturday morning cartoon show starring Scrooge McDuck and his three grandnephews Huey, Dewey and Louie, and it became one of the most popular games on the system as a result.

The story goes that Scrooge – who's already a world class millionaire – isn't satisfied with his wealth because there's one thing he still needs: five lost treasures that have been scattered around the world and beyond. He needs to head to the Amazon, the Himalayas, Transylvania, Africa and even the Moon to find each treasure, and maybe then he'll be happy. Maybe. Like a number of Capcom's other Disney games, DuckTales is based on the Mega Man game engine. Instead of firing bullets, however, Scrooge is armed with his trusty walking stick. This lets him thwack objects he's standing next to, but more importantly he can also use it as a pogo stick. This has a variety of uses: he can use it to jump higher, he can bounce on enemies' heads to kill them, and it even lets him travel over spikes without taking damage. DuckTales is well-known for its non-linear gameplay – you can take on the five stages in any order you want – and also its music, which is widely believed to be among the best on the NES. ■

FACT

DuckTales was ported to the Game Boy a year later, and went on to become Capcom's best selling game on that system too.

DUCKTALES 2

Year	1993
Publisher	Capcom
Developer	Capcom

ALTHOUGH THE NES was nearing the end of its life by the summer of 1993, that didn't stop Capcom from chucking one more gem onto Nintendo's machine. In DuckTales 2, Huey, Dewey and Louie find part of a treasure map drawn by Scrooge McDuck's father Fergus. Scrooge heads off to find the McDuck family treasure, this time taking in Niagara Falls, Egypt, the Bermuda Triangle, the lost continent of Mu and his native Scotland. Gameplay is similar to the first game except Scrooge's pogo jump is easier to pull off (jump and press B instead of Down + B) and he can now upgrade his stick so he can hit harder, jump higher and pull stronger. Because of how late it launched, it's considered relatively rare. ■

FACT

Launchpad McQuack and Gyro call Scrooge 'Uncle Scrooge' in DuckTales 2, even though he isn't their uncle.

DUNGEON MAGIC: SWORD OF THE ELEMENTS

Year	1990
Publisher	Taito
Developer	Natsume

DARCES IS AN evil Dark Overlord who was defeated 500 years ago by the great warrior Magi, who had a legendary suit of armour and six 'beautiful swords'. Five of these swords were made with the powers of the elements while the sixth, Tores, was made with an unknown metal and is the most powerful sword in the world. Magi has long since died, but Darces is back so it's up to you to find Magi's six swords – really, how many swords does one person need? – and beat him again. This first-person RPG is similar to The Bard's Tale but is notable for its massive selection of spells: by combining elemental runes, there are 243 in total to discover. ■

FACT

The game's manual suggests you draw a map as you progress, as with tabletop RPG games. 'Good fortune go with you,' it states, 'and don't forget your graph paper!'

DUSTY DIAMOND'S ALL-STAR SOFTBALL

Year 1990
Publisher Broderbund
Developer Tose

DID YOU KNOW every year the world's best softball players take part in the World All-Star Softball Championship in Mudville? Probably not, because they don't in real life. They do here, though, and you get to choose your own team of 10 from the 60 players available. Impressively, all 60 – from Ace McFace to 'Sparky' Nackledrag – have their own personality and abilities, meaning you have to choose carefully to put the best team together. The single-player game involves defeating five other teams of 10 from the remaining players, before facing off against the powerful, all-female Amazons team. With six unique stadiums (ranging from one on a cliff edge to one in a local park complete with a pond), there's a lot of variety here. ■

FACT

Despite being a softball game, the rules are more like that of baseball. The only real difference is that here there are only seven innings instead of nine.

DYNOWARZ: THE DESTRUCTION OF SPONDYLUS

Year 1990
Publisher Bandai
Developer Advance Communication Company

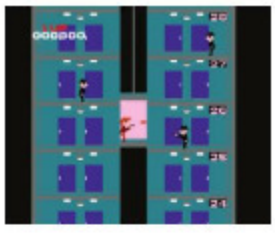
THE PSYCHOTIC DR Brainius has infected the man-made Spondylus Solar System's life support computers with a virus, and sent a bunch of giant robot dinosaurs to take over. Professor Proteus, the man behind Spondylus, decides it's time to unleash his own robosaur, Cyborasaurus, to save the day. Dynowarz is a side-scrolling action platformer consisting of two types of gameplay. Each level begins with you inside Cyborasaurus, trying to reach the artificial intelligence compounds on each planet. When you do, the Professor leaves his robo-dino behind and enters the compound in an attempt to destroy the virus, before legging it back, jumping into his metallic monstrosity and heading to the next planet. While the idea of robot dinosaurs sounds great, the game suffers from being easy and buggy. ■

FACT

When you complete the game, you're given the presumptuous message: 'Congratulations! You've finished another great game from Bandai.'

ELEVATOR ACTION

Year 1987
Publisher Taito
Developer Micronics



SUPER-SLEUTH AGENT 17 (CODENAMED Otto) has been given a mission: land on the rooftop of a 30-floor heavily guarded enemy defence tower, break in and make your way down to the ground floor, while stealing all their secret government documents from inside any red doors you find along the way. Armed with a pistol, you have to make use of the numerous elevators and escalators inside the tower to make your way down, while shooting the countless enemies who emerge from doors to try and gun you down. As you get near the bottom of the tower, things get more difficult: the lights are off in one section, while another has a more complicated array of elevators, making you consider which order to take them in. ■

FACT

A sequel called Elevator Actions Returns was released in arcades in 1994 and later came to the Sega Saturn, PS2 and Xbox. It had three playable characters and six different towers.

ELIMINATOR BOAT DUEL

Year 1991
Publisher Electro Brain
Developer Sculptured Software / Radioactive Software

A SPEEDBOAT RACING game with 24 different tracks, Eliminator Boat Duel (or 'Elimonator Boat Duel', as the top of the cartridge says) features two distinct types of viewpoint and switches between them at certain parts of each race. After a brief side-on section at the start line you get either (depending on the course) a top-down racing section similar to the likes of Micro Machines, or a third-person behind-the-boat view. As you progress and the tracks get longer, the game starts to switch between these views numerous times during each race. The slightly questionable aim to all of this boat racing action, according to the manual, is to win each race so you can end up 'holding the trophy and the gorgeous girl'. ■

FACT

There are eight opponents, each racing you three times. These range from the hopeless Seasick Sidney to the champion, the oddly weak-sounding Disaster Don.

ELITE

Year 1991
Publisher Imagineer
Developer Ian Bell & David Braben

ELITE WAS ORIGINALLY created for the BBC Micro and Acorn Electron in 1984 by British developers Ian Bell and David Braben, and was subsequently ported to a wide variety of home computers. The NES version, released seven years later, was the only console port. It's a critically acclaimed space trading game in which players – starting off at a space station with a measly 100 credits and a low-powered ship to their name – head out and discover their own adventure by playing the game however they see fit. You can take on missions for the military, mine asteroids, become a bounty hunter, try a spot of space piracy, or just stick to your designated role and take part in a spot of trading. The sheer size of Elite – there are over 2,000 procedurally generated planets in the game – gave it a real sense of scale and made players feel like they really were exploring space. Bell and Braben have each stated that they believe the NES version to be one of the best, although it didn't completely pass through Nintendo's family-friendly filter unscathed. The trading element of the game lets you trade in certain illegal goods, which in other versions includes narcotics and slaves. In the NES port, these have been replaced with exotic species and the somewhat less controversial but significantly cooler-sounding robot slaves. Of all the NES games that made it to Europe but not North America, Elite is arguably the best of the bunch. ■

FACT

Bell and Braben fell out when Braben reportedly tried to sue Bell over a 1995 interview in which he criticised the way Braben handled the sequels to Elite. The pair still aren't talking.

EXCITEBIKE

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1

THIS NES LAUNCH game is a motocross racer where balance is as important as speed. There are two main game types: Selection A has you racing on your own, while Selection B puts you against other racers. Whatever you choose, the aim is the same: finish in at least third place in a qualifying race to reach the Excitebike (championship) race. Your bike has two speed settings: the A button accelerates and the B button activates a turbo boost. This makes you go faster but also overheats your engine, risking shutdown. This is overcome with speed arrows located on the course: drive over these and your bike's temperature is reset, meaning skillful players can drive with the turbo on for most of the race and use the arrows to keep the engine cool. It wouldn't be a motocross game without jumps, of course, and Excitebike's come in all shapes and sizes. Moving the D-Pad left and right shifts your balance: this controls how high and far your bike takes off from a jump, but more importantly it also determines how cleanly you land. If it's a sloppy landing you'll slow down, but if it's a hopeless one you'll fall off your bike, wasting crucial seconds. Excitebike was part of Nintendo's 'Programmable Series', which means it also has a Design mode where players can create their own tracks. This mode has 'save' and 'load' options, but they didn't work because they were designed for the Famicom Disk System, which didn't make it outside Japan. ■

FACT

Excitebike spawned a bunch of sequels, including Excitebike 64, Excite Truck, Excitebots and WiiWare game Excitebike: World Rally. Most recently, an Excitebike track featured as DLC in Mario Kart 8.

F-117A STEALTH FIGHTER

Year 1992
Publisher MicroProse
Developer MicroProse

A LARGE PART of what made MicroProse so successful in the 1980s and early 1990s was its combat flight simulation games. It published more than ten different air combat sims during this period, and while most were designed with home computers in mind, F-117A Stealth Fighter is the only one released solely on the NES. Sitting in the cockpit of a F-117A Nighthawk (the world's first stealth jet), you take on a number of missions, many of which are initially based on real-life conflicts like the Gulf War and the US invasion of Panama. As you progress, you move onto fictional conflicts, such as a war in Korea. You even get to fight UFOs, after you learn that aliens have set up a secret base near the North Pole. ■

FACT

When you finish the game a parade is held in your name. Bystanders hold signs saying 'Cheers for our stealth pilot,' 'MPS games are the best' and 'this space for rent'.

F-15 STRIKE EAGLE

Year 1992
Publisher MicroProse
Developer MicroProse

THE GAME ON which F-117A Stealth Fighter was based, F-15 Strike Eagle was released on a variety of home computers throughout the late 1980s before making it to the NES. Naturally, both it and F-117A look very similar, although this time you're instead flying a McDonnell Douglas F-15E Strike Eagle aircraft. Based primarily on the Gulf War, there are seven main missions this time, taking you to the likes of Libya, the Iraq–Kuwait border, Karbala, Basra, Southern Kuwait and Baghdad. Each mission gives you a number of primary and secondary targets which you have to locate and bomb while also gunning down any enemy aircraft you come across. There's an Ace difficulty level which unlocks some secret missions, but they're fairly standard and don't involve aliens this time. ■

FACT

There were two more F-15 Strike Eagle games. The second also got a console release, making it to the Sega Mega Drive. The third, however, was PC-only.

FAMILY FEUD

Year 1991
Publisher GameTek
Developer Beam Software

ANOTHER IN GAMETEK'S series of game show adaptations, this time based on CBS's late '80s revival of *Family Feud* (better known in the UK as *Family Fortunes*). As in the show, two teams of five families try to guess answers from a list of survey results in an attempt to eventually reach 200 points and take part in the Fast Money Round, where they can win up to $20,000. Given the random nature of the answers in a show like this, Family Feud is not a multiple-choice game. Instead, players must type in their guesses. Because of this, the game has error correction built in: if players spell an answer incorrectly but the game can tell what they meant, it awards a right answer and shows the correct spelling. ■

FACT

There have been over 60 international versions of *Family Feud* over the years, including Mexico's *100 Mexicans Said* and Japan's *I Quizzed 100 People*.

FARIA: A WORLD OF MYSTERY AND DANGER!

Year 1991
Publisher Nexoft
Developer Game Arts

THIS ACTION RPG starts off as one story, but then throws an interesting twist into the works. As ever, a princess has been kidnapped, and the King of Faria has offered her hand in marriage to whoever rescues her. Your character, an immigrant soldier, heads out and saves the day, but the thing is you're a woman. The King instead throws a party but an unknown man poisons the food, making all the townspeople sick. Turns out your quest is nowhere near over! Faria borrows elements from numerous games: although the town exploration and random battle encounters are similar to traditional RPGs like Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest, these battles are Zelda-like real-time fights. Faria's story is clever, but the amount of grinding needed to level up renders it repetitive. ■

FACT

Faria's program director was Takashi Miyaji, who went on to work on the much loved Lunar and Grandia RPGs as designer and director respectively.

FAXANADU

Year 1989
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Hudson Soft

THE ELF TOWN of Eolis used to be a peace-loving place, until meteorites started raining down on its World Tree, drying up the land's water. Evil dwarves have taken this opportunity to invade Eolis and cause havoc, so the Elven king gives your unnamed hero 1500 gold and asks you to enter the World Tree, travel through it to reach the Evil Place, and destroy the Evil One who caused all this. Faxanadu is a difficult but entertaining side-scrolling mashup of genres: while it's technically an action platformer similar to the likes of Castlevania, the fact you can also gain experience, visit towns and talk to their residents, use magic and collect items means it's technically part-platformer, part-RPG. ■

FACT

According to the manual, the 'Evil Place' where the Evil One lives is called Dartmoor, which will be disappointing to residents of Devon in England where an area of moorland has the same name.

FELIX THE CAT

Year 1992
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Shimada Kikaku

ONE OF THE NES's hidden gems, Felix the Cat is an entertaining platformer starring the classic cartoon character from the silent film era (though this game is based on the more modern design introduced in the 1950s). The evil Professor has kidnapped Felix's girlfriend Kitty Cat and taken her far away. He'll only give her back if Felix hands over his famous 'Magic Bag of Tricks' so off Felix heads, bag in hand, to try to rescue Kitty without giving the Professor what he wants. The game takes place over nine worlds, and you'll make use of Felix's bag throughout: the standard attack makes a boxing glove pop out of the bag, while in later levels it transforms into a boat, a plane and even a spaceship. ■

FACT

Hudson Soft introduced a free booklet in 1992 called Master Higgins' 10 Tips for Responsible Play. It was advertised in manuals for games like Felix the Cat and parents could order it to learn how to stop their kids playing too much.

FERRARI GRAND PRIX CHALLENGE

Year 1992
Publisher Acclaim
Developer System 3

A RACING GAME based on the Formula One world championship and developed by British studio System 3. Playing as a Ferrari driver, you take part in a full 16-race season, taking on each track in the same order as in the 1990 and 1991 F1 campaigns. Each track has its own unique background image, meaning Monaco has a city-like landscape (even though you don't actually race through the streets as in real life). Each race has a qualifying lap which determines your starting position, then it's onto the main event itself. Damaging your car or wearing out its tyres requires a pit stop, where how fast you can press the A and B buttons determines how quickly you leave the pit area. ■

FACT

The Scuderia Ferrari F1 team has won 16 F1 championships at the time of writing, though they weren't doing so hot when this game was released. After winning in 1983, they didn't win again until 1999.

FESTER'S QUEST

Year 1989
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft

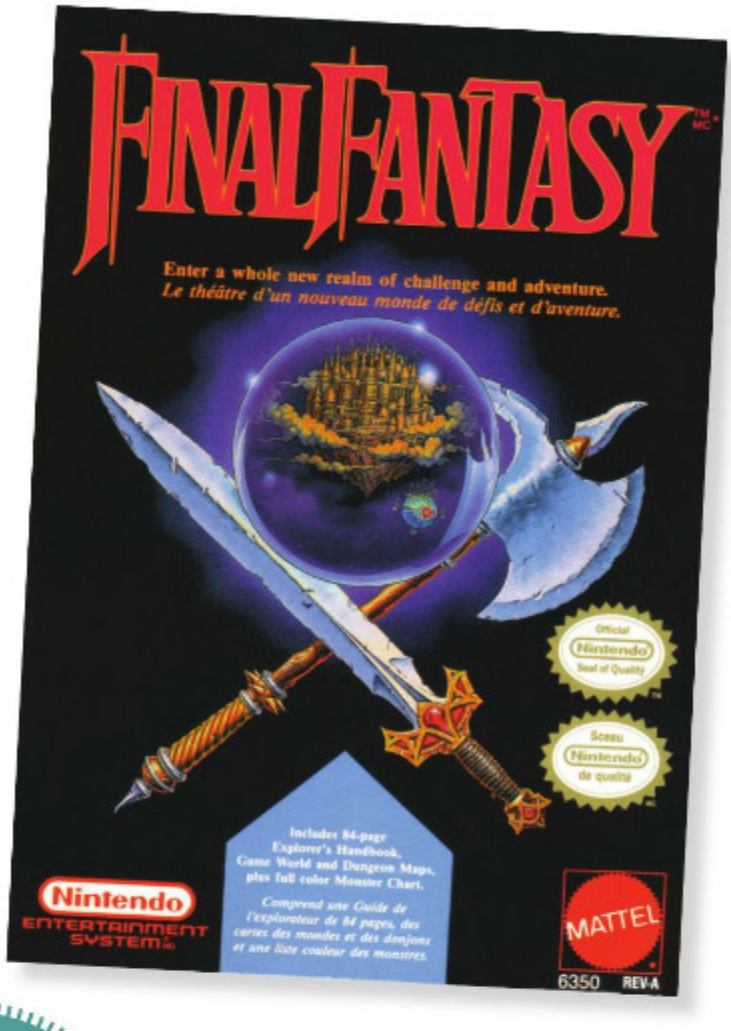
A CURIOUS *ADDAMS Family* spin-off starring the bald and bizarre Uncle Fester. While out moonbathing one night, Fester sees a giant UFO descend from the sky and shine a huge beam of light down onto the city. Deciding to investigate, he heads off into the city and finds himself smack-dab in the middle of an alien invasion. The game's a top-down shooter similar to the maze sections in Sunsoft's Blaster Master, and you're armed with two main weapons – a gun and a whip – which can either be upgraded or downgraded depending on what power-ups you collect. It's notorious for being an extremely difficult game though this is alleviated a little by noose power-ups: use one of these and Lurch appears, killing all on-screen enemies. ■

FACT

The manual perhaps realises that the game's a little on the tricky side, as it advises that 'the use of a 'Turbo' type joystick with rapid fire feature will be quite helpful'.

FINAL FANTASY

Year	1990
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Square


FINAL FANTASY
Enter a whole new realm of challenge and adventure.
Le théâtre d'un nouveau monde de défis et d'aventure.
Includes 84-page Explorer's Handbook, Game World and Dungeon Maps, plus full color Monster Chart.
Comprend son Guide de l'explorateur de 84 pages, des cartes des mondes et des donjons et une liste couleur des monstres.
Nintendo ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
MATTEL
6350 REV-A

'THE WORLD IS veiled in darkness. The wind stops, the sea is wild, and the earth begins to rot. The people wait, their only hope, a prophecy: when the world is in darkness, Four Warriors will come...' So begins the intro to one of the most fruitful final rolls of the dice in the video games industry. The name Final Fantasy wasn't just chosen because it sounded cool, though the real reason depends on who you ask. According to designer Hironobu Sakaguchi, he was planning to leave Square and go back to college, so this was to be his final game. Its composer Nobuo Uematsu, however, backs the urban legend that it was because Square was in danger of going bankrupt and if Final Fantasy wasn't successful the company may have gone under. Regardless of the true origin story, all gamers know what happened next: Sakaguchi's creation was a huge success, and the fact that Final Fantasy XV was released in 2016 shows that the title is becoming even less accurate as the years go by.

The adventure that started it all off begins in the kingdom of Coneria, where four Light Warriors arrive, each holding a darkened orb. These orbs once controlled the world's elements – earth, fire, water and wind – and so the warriors' mission is to bring light back to the orbs and remove the world from darkness.

Although there had been numerous RPGs released before Final Fantasy arrived in Japan in 1987 (including the already popular Dragon Quest series), Sakaguchi's game was such a high quality example of the genre, with such a well-written storyline for its time, that it quickly cemented itself as one of the best around. The fact it showed your party of four characters on-screen during battles – something not even Dragon Quest did – helped players relate to them and connect with them more. The six different classes (Fighter, Thief, Black Belt and Red, White and Black Mage) could be upgraded later in the game: this changed the character's sprite and gave a visual indication that your hard work was paying off, showing their levelling up as a tangible result rather than just a number going up by one.

FACT

In the Japanese version, a gravestone in Elfheim reads 'here lies Link', a reference to the Zelda games. Because Nintendo published the game in the west, the American version was changed to 'here lies Erdrick', a dig at Dragon Quest.

Also notable is Uematsu's fantastic music, which is so important to the game that it could be considered a character in its own right. Even given the limitations of the NES's sound processor, Uematsu's beautiful compositions made playing the game for long periods of time a treat. That the prologue and main theme continue to be used in Final Fantasy games to this day speaks volumes of their quality.

Another two Final Fantasy games were made for the Famicom in Japan, but they weren't ported to the west: because it took three years for the first game to make it to North America, by the time the sequels arrived the NES would have been finished. Instead, the series wouldn't see another English-language release until the SNES's Final Fantasy IV, which was renamed Final Fantasy II for the American market. ■

FIRE 'N ICE

Year 1993
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo

FIRE 'N ICE is a prequel to Solomon's Key, and tells the story of the original game's hero Dana when he was still an apprentice with hardly any magic powers. When the ice-covered Coolmint Island is attacked by the evil wizard Druidle and set on fire, the Queen of the Fairies gives Dana the power to create ice and sends him off on his first ever adventure. Much like its predecessor this is a puzzle game, but this time the aim is to remove all the fire from each stage using your ability to create and remove blocks of ice. Fire 'n Ice was renamed Solomon's Key 2 in Europe, presumably because a platformer called Fire & Ice had been released on home computers the year before. ■

FACT

The game's box has a huge warning on the front saying: 'Warning! This cartridge contains logic puzzles that may be highly addictive. Caution and restraint are recommended.'

FISHER-PRICE: FIREHOUSE RESCUE

Year 1992
Publisher GameTek
Developer Imagineering

THE LAST OF three Fisher-Price licensed games on the NES, but while the others were developed by Beam Software this was instead handled by Imagineering, the in-house New Jersey studio of publisher Absolute Entertainment. The aim here is to drive your Fisher-Price firetruck around a maze-like town, looking for houses on fire (though, since it's aimed at very young children, you never actually see any flames). When you reach a house you have to position your ladder under each window, allowing the unnaturally happy Fisher-Price people to climb out to safety. As the difficulty level increases, extra elements are added like a time limit and key that must be collected to access a locked house. Complete each difficulty to be promoted to firefighter, lieutenant, captain or chief. ■

FACT

Fisher-Price was set up in 1930. Its first ever toy was Dr Doodle, a duck on a string with wheels on its feet.

FISHER-PRICE: I CAN REMEMBER

Year 1990
Publisher GameTek
Developer Beam Software

NOT ENOUGH GAMES these days launch with a stirring chiptune rendition of Old MacDonald Had a Farm but that's the very ditty that welcomes children every time they start up I Can Remember, another of the three Fisher-Price NES games. Upon starting the game you're treated to another gem, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, as you take part in what's essentially a basic matching game. Whether you choose to play alone, against a friend or against the CPU the general idea remains the same: you're presented with 12, 16 or 20 boxes (depending on the difficulty level) and have to find two that match. If you do, you get points and keep playing. If not, play passes to the other player. Whoever has the most points after three rounds wins. ■

FACT

In a clever piece of stealth marketing the pictures revealed under the squares are all Fisher-Price toys, from roller skates to that weird plastic 'Corn Popper' thing you used to wheel around to make plastic balls bounce around inside it.

FISHER-PRICE: PERFECT FIT

Year 1990
Publisher GameTek
Developer Beam Software

ROUNDING OFF THE Fisher-Price trilogy is Perfect Fit, which launched alongside I Can Remember. This time the theme music accompanying the action includes the likes of Baa Baa Black Sheep and Hickory Dickory Dock, which really has no relevance to what's going on in the game. What you have here is a series of three puzzles, each of which shows a number of silhouettes on the screen. One by one Fisher-Price products appear, and the player has to match them with the silhouettes (hence Perfect Fit). In higher difficulty levels, some objects have to be flipped. Special mention must go to the special cameo appearance by that plastic telephone with the face that every kid used to have. ■

FACT

Fisher-Price continued to licence out video games for a number of years. While most of these were on home computers, there were some console releases like Rescue Heroes: Molten Menace on PlayStation.

FIST OF THE NORTH STAR

Year 1989
Publisher Taxan
Developer Shouei System

THERE HAD ALREADY been a Fist of the North Star game released in Japan in 1986, so this – the first ever western product related to the popular manga and anime series – is actually a localised port of the second game. Based on the second series of the anime, it follows the Tentei story arc as Ken tries to rescue his people from the tyranny of the Emperor Heaven. It's a side-scrolling action game where you jump, punch and kick your way through eight stages. As you progress you gain new abilities, like rapid attacks and a projectile attack. The game was criticised for its awkward control system: the simple act of entering a door is performed by pressing A, B and Right on the D-Pad. ■

FACT

Black Belt and Last Battle, released on the Sega Master System and Mega Drive respectively, are also Fist of the North Star games, albeit localised for the west with the licence removed.

FLIGHT OF THE INTRUDER

Year 1991
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Imagineering

BASED ON THE 1986 novel of the same name, Flight of the Intruder plays out over a series of 12 missions set during the Vietnam War. Players get to fly two different types of aircraft, the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II and the Grumman A-6 Intruder. The Phantom is used for aerial combat as you try to take down enemy MiG 21 planes from the North Vietnamese air force. The Intruder, meanwhile, is a bomber designed to take out ground targets. Each mission has a number of waypoints where you switch between planes: for example, you may have to take out aircraft with the Phantom first to make it easier for the Intruder to bomb targets without being shot down. ■

FACT

A movie based on *Flight of the Intruder*, starring Danny Glover and Willem Dafoe, was released the same year. It was panned by critics, with Roger Ebert calling it 'a mess'.

THE FLINTSTONES: THE RESCUE OF DINO AND HOPPY

Year 1991
Publisher Taito
Developer Taito / Sol

THE FLINTSTONES AND the Rubbles are heartbroken when a time-traveller from the thirtieth century looking for dinosaurs appears in their prehistoric town and kidnaps their pets Dino and Hoppy. The crook heads back to the future (ahem) to put the dinos in a zoo, but there's hope: their alien friend Gazoo has a broken time machine. If Fred can gather the pieces, Gazoo can repair it and send Fred to the future for the game's final level, where none other than George Jetson points him in the right direction ('he's notorious for being eccentric around here', George claims). While most of the game is a platformer, there are also sections where you have to win one-on-one basketball games for some reason. ■

FACT

The villain's name is Dr Butler in the game's intro, but it's Dr Turner in the manual. It's generally accepted that the game is correct.

THE FLINTSTONES: THE SURPRISE AT DINOSAUR PEAK

Year 1994
Publisher Taito
Developer Taito / Sol

THE SEQUEL TO The Rescue of Dino and Hoppy is similar to its predecessor, only now you can play as Barney too. This time Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm have wandered off and are playing at the foot of a volcano. A lake of lava stands between Fred and Barney, and the kids, but a greedy pterodactyl offers to carry them over if they pay him five gemstones, so off you wander through 12 stages in search of the gems. The game was released in limited numbers due to the fact that most gamers had already moved on to the SNES. As a result, it's considered one of the rarer games on the system with copies selling for between $800 and $2,000 depending on condition. ■

FACT

A regular rumour among collectors is that this game was only made available in the US as a Blockbuster rental. There has never been any evidence to prove this.

FLYING DRAGON: THE SECRET SCROLL

Year 1989
Publisher Culture Brain
Developer Culture Brain

WHEN RYUHI WAS a young lad, he trained under his wise teacher Juan and became a master of Kenpo. When Juan is attacked by the evil Tusk Soldiers and robbed of his secret scrolls, Ryuhi – armed with the final scroll – moves to Shorinji to continue his training. Six years later, the Tusk Soldiers challenge him to a martial arts tournament, so Ryuhi heads off to both win the tournament and get the other scrolls back. Flying Dragon consists of two types of level: the 'journey' stages are side-scrolling platform levels where you punch approaching enemies, while the 'match' stages are one-on-one fights taking place inside a ring. These sections offer a much wider variety of moves, and blocking is as important as attacking. ■

FACT

When you beat the game after collecting all six scrolls, it's revealed the final boss was a fake. You then have to play through the game again, getting all six scrolls and four newly-added crystals to fight the real boss.

FLYING WARRIORS

Year 1991
Publisher Culture Brain
Developer Culture Brain

IF YOU'RE WONDERING whether someone at Culture Brain loved the word 'Flying' for some reason, this is actually related to Flying Dragon. While that was the western version of Japanese game Hiryu no Ken, this is instead a combination of Hiryu no Ken II and III. The plot is unrelated to the previous game: this time an evil force called Demonyx has attacked the 'Light Dimension', so it's up to the Flying Warriors – five heroes previously sent to the planet by the Dragonlord in anticipation of this event – to battle him and his soldiers. As in Flying Dragon there are 'journey' and 'battle' sections, but there are also new 'command' sections where you issue orders, RPG style, to your heroes during certain boss battles. ■

FACT

Although there are five Flying Warriors, you usually control only one character, named Rick. At times he can switch with one of his teammates, or even transform into a costumed hero, Power Rangers style.

FORMULA ONE: BUILT TO WIN

Year 1990
Publisher SETA
Developer Winky Soft

ALTHOUGH ITS TITLE may suggest it's strictly an Formula One game, Built to Win's main career mode makes you earn the right to get behind the wheel of an F1 car. Starting with a class D licence and an underpowered Mini Cooper, you have to win a series of 30 races around America and use the prize money to upgrade your car, eventually trading it for a Vector W2 then a Ferrari F40. Once you've worked your way through the races and earned your class A licence, only then are you awarded with an F1 car and given permission to take part in a full F1 season. This type of career mode was ahead of its time, and didn't become standard practice in racing games until generations later. ■

FACT

If you like taking risks off the track too, there's a casino in the game where you can risk your race winnings in an attempt to afford better upgrades.

FORMULA 1 SENSATION

Year 1993
Publisher Palcom
Developer Konami

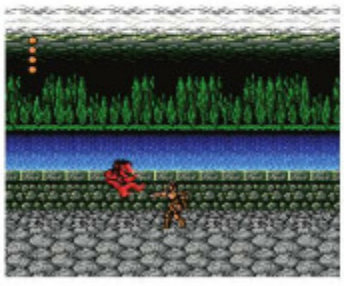
UNLIKE MOST F1 games on the NES, Formula 1 Sensation (which was only released in Japan and Europe) had an official FIA Formula One World Championship licence. This means all the constructors were real, many of the drivers' names were real (including Mansell, Senna and Alesi), and even some real-world sponsors like Shell and Nestle appeared on billboards. The game itself is fairly straightforward: you can either choose one of the 18 tracks for a one-off race, or take part in a full F1 season. Despite all the official licences, the game's collision system makes for a slightly unrealistic experience: bashing into opponents' cars causes them huge damage and you hardly any, to the extent that ploughing through everyone and finishing the race alone is an achievable tactic. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of the game, called F-1 Sensation, was the last new game Konami released for the Famicom. Although it released more Famicom software after F-1 Sensation, these were all re-releases.

FRANKENSTEIN: THE MONSTER RETURNS

Year 1991
Publisher Bandai
Developer Tose



MANY YEARS AFTER he was killed by villagers and laid to rest, Frankenstein's monster comes back to life via sheer coincidence after a bolt of lightning hits his tombstone. He kidnaps the beautiful daughter of the village elder, and uses his evil magic (because he has magic now, apparently) to summon an army of monsters. It's up to your unnamed village swordsman to rescue the daughter and send Frankie back into the dirt. The Monster Returns is a Castlevania-inspired action platformer where you hack and slash your way through numerous beasts, including Medusa and Death, culminating in a ridiculous final boss battle against an enormous screen-filling Frankenstein's Monster complete with a floating fire-breathing head flying around and trying to hit you. I don't believe it's canon. ■

FACT

As in any other pieces of Frankenstein-related media, The Monster Returns refers to the monster as Frankenstein, even though that was the name of the doctor who gave him life.

FREEDOM FORCE

Year 1988
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft

OF THE 16 games that support the Zapper, Freedom Force is perhaps the most impressive. It's an on-rails shooter in the style of arcade lightgun games, in which the aim is simply to shoot down the enemies as they appear while taking care to avoid hitting hostages or random members of the public (such as skateboarding kids, old ladies and 'bathing beauties'). Playing as 'Rad Rex' (in two-player games, your partner is 'Manic Jackson'), you have to take out a group of dangerous criminals known as the Unknown Guerillas – led by the oddly-named Eugene Extreme – who have captured an entire airport and are holding it hostage. An inventive bonus stage has you playing Hangman by shooting letters with your gun. ■

FACT

There are three secret words hidden in the game. Players could write them down in a form in the manual and send the form to Sunsoft in exchange for a Freedom Force decal.

FRIDAY THE 13TH

Year 1989
Publisher LJN
Developer Atlus

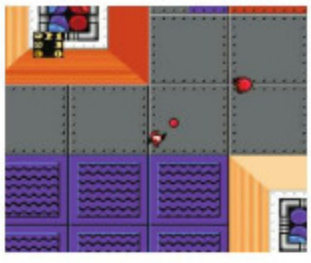
CAMP CRYSTAL LAKE is the only place in the world where life expectancy is lower than 20, yet people still keep setting up summer camps there. Another camp opens and sure enough, just like clockwork, Jason Voorhees returns once again to slay a fresh set of teenagers. Taking control of six camp counsellors (you switch between them as you play), you have to find him and kill him three times. It seems Jason could have stayed at home this time, however, as for no clear reason the camp is also infested with killer crows, wolves, bats and even zombies, meaning you're likely to die before you even reach the main man himself in one of his Punch-Out!! style boss battles. ■

FACT

Friday The 13th is perhaps best known for its refreshingly blunt failure screen: 'You and your friends are dead. Game Over.'

FUN HOUSE

Year 1991
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer Realtime Associates



WHILE MOST GAME show adaptations on the NES are faithful renditions of their TV counterparts, Fun House isn't. The show (the US version, not the more successful UK one) had its child contestants answering questions, taking part in various comedy challenges, racing cars and finally entering the titular Fun House to win prizes. The NES version is a top-down action game in which the player, wearing roller skates, has to skate around throwing tomatoes at a series of targets over the course of 72 increasingly more complicated stages. Not even the presence of the show's host J. D. Roth – who makes snarky comments when you lose – makes up for the fact that you don't get to actually enter the Fun House as seen on television. ■

FACT

The third series of *Fun House* in the US had a bunch of celebrity child contestants, including Paul from *The Wonder Years*, the kid from *Alf* and even Leonardo DiCaprio.

G.I. JOE: A REAL AMERICAN HERO

Year 1991
Publisher Taxan
Developer KID

A VIDEO GAME based on the gloriously well-articulated 3.75-inch (95mm) action figures that dominated American toy shops and televisions throughout the '80s and early '90s. It's a run-and-gun action platformer similar to the likes of Contra (although far less difficult), with the twist being that players can control a team of three characters chosen from a pool of five: Duke, Snake Eyes, Blizzard, Captain Grid-Iron and Rock 'n Roll (with Hawk joining the team for the final level). Each character has their own strengths and weaknesses: for example, Snake Eyes throws fireballs, which conserves the team's limited shared ammo, but they're weak. The game culminates in a final battle against the evil Cobra Commander, who can turn you into a lizard if you aren't careful. ■

FACT

When the 3.75-inch G.I. Joe action figures launched in 1982, the original G.I. Joe character from the '60s wasn't among them. Hasbro didn't bring him back until 1994, where he was a mail-in exclusive.

G.I. JOE: THE ATLANTIS FACTOR

Year 1992
Publisher Capcom
Developer KID

THE G.I. JOE licence moved from Taxan to Capcom the following year, but Tokyo-based developer KID remained for the sequel. The Atlantis Factor has our heroes heading to the lost city of Atlantis, which has been raised from the depths by the Cobra Commander and is being used as a heavily guarded Cobra base. As before, players can swap between different G.I. Joe characters – Hawk, Roadblock, Wet Suit, Snake Eyes, Storm Shadow and Duke – but this time you start off as just Hawk and have to earn the rest, Mega Man style, by completing each level. There are also support characters Spirit, Gung-Ho and Big Bear who, once found, can restore your life or ammo, or even revive a dead Joe. ■

FACT

G.I. Joe team leader Duke was supposed to die in the 1987 animated movie, but kids were so traumatised by Optimus Prime's death in 1986's *Transformers: The Movie* that last-minute dialogue was thrown in, saying he was just in a coma and recovered later.

GALAGA: DEMONS OF DEATH

Year 1988
Publisher Bandai
Developer Namco

NAMCO'S 1981 ARCADE hit Galaga took the Space Invaders formula and livened it up a bit. Enemies swooped in from the side of the screen before joining their formation, and would occasionally break rank to dive-bomb towards you, sometimes trying to capture you with a tractor beam. This NES port released a number of years later is almost arcade perfect, bar a couple of minor differences due to the system hardware. The musical cues sound ever so slightly different because of the NES's audio processing unit, and the screen ratio (a normal 4:3 TV picture instead of the arcade version's vertical display) means your ship is a bit closer to the alien formation, but other than that it plays exactly the same. ■

FACT

PlayStation owners may recognise Galaga as the game that plays during the loading screen in the first Tekken. Its predecessor, Galaxian, is the loading screen game for Ridge Racer.

GALAXY 5000

Year 1991
Publisher Activision
Developer Activision

IT'S NICE TO know that in the fifty-first century, mankind won't have mutated or evolved to such a ridiculous degree that racing each other will no longer be a thing. This is proved by Galaxy 5000, an isometric racing game where your 'cars' are instead floating spaceships similar to landspeeders from Star Wars (or the cars from WipEout, if you'd rather). Completing races earns you money which can be used to repair your craft, or buy a better one. The 45-degree viewpoint and the ability to shoot your enemies mean Galaxy 5000 looks and plays a lot like RC Pro-Am, but it's not exactly the same: there's a wider variety of weapons and you can also make your ship jump to avoid attacks. ■

FACT

When you buy a new vehicle you still get to keep your old one. This is because, interestingly, if your new ship is destroyed it's gone for good, and you'll need to revert back to your previous one.

GARGOYLE'S QUEST II

Year 1992
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

THE FIRST GARGOYLE'S Quest was a Game Boy game, and this NES follow-up is a prequel. Like its handheld predecessor it stars Firebrand, a gargoyle who previously appeared as a villain in Ghosts 'n Goblins. Firebrand is a young warrior training to be the best, but his daily workout routine is interrupted when a mysterious black light appears and drains all the magic from the land. The game's part JRPG, part platformer: it has top-down sections where you explore towns and talk to villagers, and side-on sections where you can run, jump, climb walls, shoot fireballs at enemies and float briefly (an ability that can last longer as you level up and your abilities improve). A Game Boy port was released in Japan in 1993. ■

FACT

Firebrand is a playable character in Ultimate Marvel vs Capcom 3. If he faces off against Doctor Strange, the doc says: 'This gargoyle's quest has failed.'

GAUNTLET

Year 1988
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

ATARI'S GAUNTLET WAS a huge success in arcades, due in part to its simultaneous four-player co-op gameplay and its digitised speech, which had the likes of 'Elf needs food badly' booming across the room. Tengen's NES version isn't a straight port: instead, it adds a number of features not present in the coin-op version. As before, you choose a character – the warrior, wizard, valkyrie or elf – and use them to fight your way through 100 top-down levels full to the brim with enemies. The digitised speech is gone, but now collecting treasure can level up your character's abilities. There are also now eight 'clue' rooms, where you have to find part of a code that unlocks the final 100th stage. ■

FACT

The voice in the Gauntlet arcade game belonged to American filmmaker Ernie Fosselius. He also recorded the 'ack-ack' voices for the aliens in Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks!* movie.

GAUNTLET II

Year 1990
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Tengen

THIS PORT OF Gauntlet's sequel was far more faithful to its arcade counterpart than the first game was. The character sprites and stages looked a lot more authentic, new features added to the arcade version (like invisible walls) were present here too, and there's even digitised speech this time (even though it's pretty garbled and hard to understand at times). More importantly, Gauntlet II is one of the first NES games to support four players simultaneously using either the NES Satellite or NES Four Score adapters. This finally allows for the proper four-player experience that made Gauntlet such a joy to play in arcades, making Gauntlet II a significantly more accomplished rendition of the 'real thing' than the first game was. ■

FACT

It's possible to beat any level by waiting for a few minutes. This turns all the walls into exits. The problem, though, is that in Gauntlet you're constantly losing health, so it's a risk.

GEMFIRE

Year 1992
Publisher Koei
Developer Koei

WHILE KOEI WAS (and still is) generally known for its strategy games based on actual historical events, every now and then it liked to show a bit more imagination. Gemfire is an example of this: while it's still a classic Koei-style war game it's set in a fantasy land called Ishmeria where six families, supported by wizards living with them, are all trying to remove the evil king Eselred from his throne and claim Ishmeria as theirs. There are two main phases when doing this: in the map screen you can upgrade your territory, hire troops and try either negotiating with or attacking neighbouring territories. If it's the latter, play switches to a turn-based tactics style battle as you try to capture the enemy base. ■

FACT

Because this is a fantasy game, the troops you hire aren't just swordsmen and gunners. There are also a bunch of monsters to enrol, from skeletons and orcs to gargoyles and giant fire-breathing lizards.

GENGHIS KHAN

Year 1990
Publisher Koei
Developer Koei

ANOTHER OF KOEI'S historical turn-based strategy games, this time based on the thirteenth century Mongol leader Genghis Khan. There are two main modes: World Conquest is a 1–4 player scenario, where players control either Genghis Khan, the Byzantine emperor Alexios I, King Richard I of England or Yoritomo of Japan, and the aim is to unify all 27 Eurasian countries under your control. Mongol Conquest, meanwhile, is a single-player story mode of sorts in which you start off as the young Temujin – before he became known as Genghis Khan – and have to unify the 14 tribes that make up the Mongolian Plains. If you beat Mongol Conquest mode, it moves straight onto World Conquest mode so you can continue to grow your dominance. ■

FACT

Many historians say Genghis Khan was responsible for the deaths of around 40 million people. Given this was the early thirteenth century, it's claimed that up to 11 per cent of the entire world's population died as a result of the Mongols' attacks.

GEORGE FOREMAN'S KO BOXING

Year 1992
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Beam Software

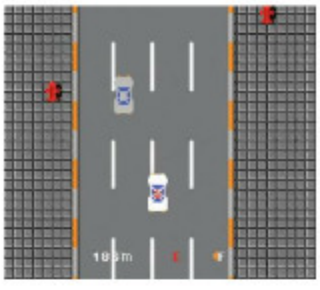
AFTER A 10-YEAR absence from the ring, 43-year-old George Foreman stepped back into the spotlight to try and become the champion again. And after that, who knows: maybe start selling grills or something. George Foreman's KO boxing is quite clearly inspired by Nintendo's own Punch-Out!! games, with the player controlling George himself from a third-person perspective as he scraps his way through a series of opponents. As in Punch-Out!! you're essentially rooted to the spot and can only briefly dodge to the side to evade your opponent's punches. The difference, though, is that this game doesn't have Punch-Out!!'s weak-spot-based combat, meaning bouts end up being dull slugfests with not much room for strategic fighting or reading your opponent's style. ■

FACT

In real life, Foreman did become the champ one more time. In 1994, at the age of 45, he beat Michael Moorer to win the World Heavyweight Championship, 20 years after he'd previously lost it to Muhammad Ali.

GHOSTBUSTERS

Year 1988
Publisher Activision
Developer Bits Laboratory



THE FIRST GAME based on the fantastic Hollywood block (and ghost) buster was originally designed by David Crane (Pitfall, A Boy and His Blob) for the C64 and Atari 800. It was then ported to a number of different systems, with the NES version handled by Japanese studio Bits Laboratory. Players start by buying a vehicle, and then roam the streets of New York busting ghosts to earn money that lets them upgrade their equipment. Eventually, you earn the right to enter the Zuul building for the final confrontation. This final section was notorious for its stair-climbing section, where the player has to climb 25 flights of stairs by mashing the A button while avoiding ghosts. The NES version is widely believed to be among the worst. ■

FACT

Beating the game gives you the badly-written message: 'Conglaturation! You have completed a great game. And prooved the justice of our culture. Now go and rest our heroes!'

GHOSTBUSTERS II

Year 1990
Publisher Activision
Developer Imagineering

A SECOND GHOSTBUSTERS movie meant a second Ghostbusters game, which this time more closely followed the events of its source material. Taking place over seven levels, the Ghostbusters have to investigate the slime that's plaguing the city, pilot the Statue of Liberty through New York then defeat the evil Vigo the Carpathian. There are three types of stage: side-scrolling sections where you shoot a 'slime blower' at ghosts, driving sections in the Ecto-1a, and the standalone Statue of Liberty stage. Although it was more faithful to the movie, Ghostbusters II was criticised for its high difficulty level. A second game was released in Europe and Japan (see New Ghostbusters II) but sorry America, this was the only one you ended up getting. ■

FACT

As if the game's one-hit kills and its insistence on scrolling to the left didn't make it tricky enough, the final stage has to be completed a total of four times – once with each Ghostbuster – before you get to see the ending.

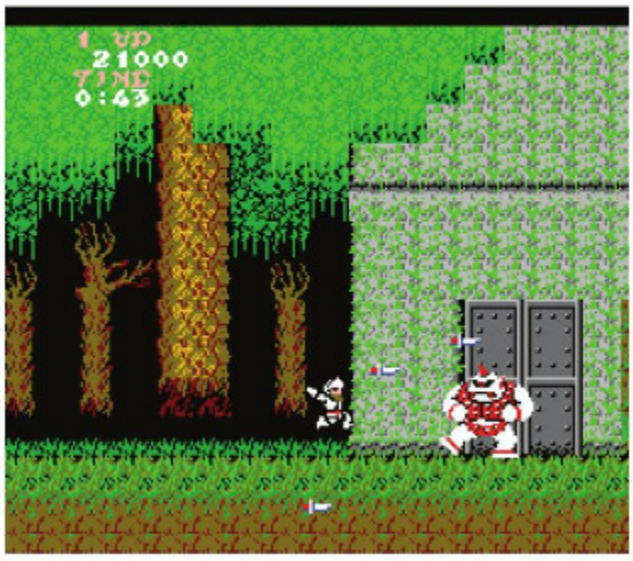
GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

Year 1986
Publisher Capcom
Developer Micronics

WHEN YOU ASK retro gamers to list some of the hardest old-school classics, it's usually only a matter of time before either Ghouls 'n Ghosts or its predecessor Ghosts 'n Goblins is mentioned, usually with a quivering lip and a single tear. It, like its sequels, tells the story of Arthur, a romantic knight who very much has the affection of his darling Princess Prin Prin. Unfortunately, the princess is kidnapped by Satan (or simply 'The Devil' in the NES version), and taken to his underworld, so it's time to do what all noble knights do and head out to rescue her. Ghosts 'n Goblins is notorious for its strict two-hit-kill mechanic: merely graze any enemy or projectile and you'll fly backwards, losing your entire suit of amour in the process. This leaves Arthur in nothing more than his tidy red boxer shorts, at which point it's safe to say he's exposed to another attack.

FACT

Arthur has appeared in a bunch of other Capcom games outside of the series he's best known for. Most notably, he was a playable character in arcade shooter Cannon Spike, as well as Marvel vs Capcom 3 and Marvel vs Capcom: Infinite.



Sure enough, take one more hit and Arthur is literally reduced to a pile of bones, with his next life beginning way back at the start of the stage, or at the single halfway checkpoint if you managed to get that far. While this may sound unbelievably harsh… well, I suppose it was. But the job in Ghosts 'n Goblins was in slowly improving your performance with each playthrough, inching your way further and further into the game until you finally reach the end, get to Satan… and realise that if you don't have the Cross weapon, you have to go back to level 5. ■

GHOST LION

Year 1992
Publisher Kemco
Developer Kemco

AFTER A GHOSTLY lion attacks young Maria's village, her parents head off to see if they can find out where it came from. When they don't return Maria gets worried, so she heads off to try to find them. Ghost Lion is a top-down RPG similar to Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior, but one of its most notable differences is the names it uses for standard RPG meters. Instead of your experience level, you're instead building Maria's 'Hope' meter, while 'Courage' replaces her health (naturally, if she runs out of courage her journey is over). She can summon spirits to help her during battles: these act like magic attacks in other RPGs, but rather than the usual MP (Magic Points) she instead uses 'Dreams' to summon them. ■

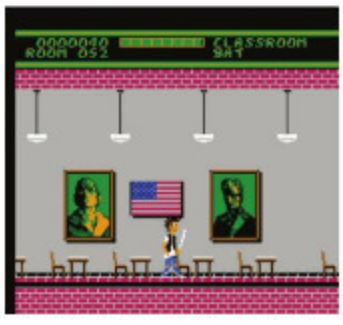
FACT

Many refer to this game as Legend of the Ghost Lion, because that's what the title screen says. The box, however, simply says Ghost Lion.

GHOUL SCHOOL

Year 1992
Publisher Electro Brain
Developer Imagineering

GHOUL SCHOOL IS a Metroidvania style adventure set in a haunted school. Spike O'Hara is a senior at Cool School High, and after finding a glowing skull in a graveyard he decides to give it to his science teacher. The skull sends a message to the realm of the dead, and various ghosts and monsters overrun the school. Spike has to find and defeat the 'Ghoul Master', while saving cheerleader Samantha in the process. Ghoul School has over 200 rooms to explore and, in true Metroidvania fashion, features a number of weapons and objects you can earn to help you reach new areas. These range from suction cup shoes which let you walk on the ceiling, to embalming fluid (which is highly effective against undead enemies). ■

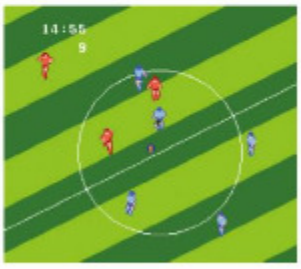


FACT

Some of the enemies in Ghoul School are unconventional to say the least. Expect to face off against an evil chef called the Grouchy Gore-met, a nasty musical note called Note-orious, and a giant heart called Admiral Aorta.

GOAL!

Year 1989
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Tose



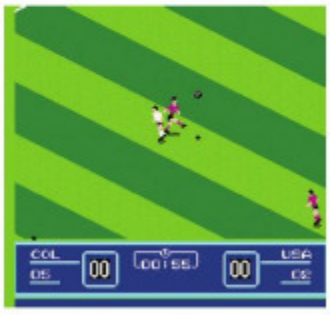
JALECO'S FIRST ATTEMPT at a football game has two main modes: World Cup mode lets you choose from 16 national teams (West Germany and USSR are in there, as a reminder of how old the game is) and take part in a traditional World Cup format ('amateur soccer's most glorious prize', according to the manual). Tournament mode, meanwhile, features eight American teams in a straight knockout competition. The manual refreshingly acknowledges the poor passing and dribbling in Goal! by advising: 'A safe strategy is shooting the ball as far upfield as possible and trying to hook or slice the ball towards one of your teammates. It's a more effective strategy than trying to slowly move the ball upfield by dribbling and passing.' ■

FACT

In Japan, Jaleco had a series of sports games called Moero!!, each covering a different sport. Goal! was a port of Moero!! 5. Other Moero!! games ported to the west include Bases Loaded, Racket Attack and Hoops.

GOAL! TWO

Year 1992
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Tose



IT'S BACK, AND this time the American teams have been left behind. Goal! Two is that rarest of beasts, a sequel that offers less than its predecessor. Other than exhibition matches there's now only one main mode, the Super Cup. This is basically World Cup mode again (albeit without the legally dubious use of the actual World Cup name this time), although there are now 24 countries to choose from with the likes of Scotland, Canada and Venezuela added to the mix. New additions include the ability to choose your formation (the first game was limited to 4–3–3 only) and an actual roster of 15 players instead of a set team of 11. An improvement on the pitch, then, even if it offered fewer modes. ■

FACT

In France, the game was known as Eric Cantona Football Challenge: Goal! 2. This isn't to be confused with Eric Cantona Football Challenge on the SNES, which is actually the French version of Rage Software's Striker.

GODZILLA: MONSTER OF MONSTERS

Year 1989
Publisher Toho
Developer Compile

WHEN PLUTO AND Neptune swap positions in space, an unknown planet simply called X attacks the Earth. Godzilla and Mothra are sent into space to defend mankind from these new alien invaders. Each stage in Monster of Monsters is called a Ring Field, and consists of a grid of hexagonal squares. You move Godzilla and Mothra along this grid, one square at a time, and encounter enemies along the way: this switches the gameplay to a side-on action platformer. The aim is to reach the enemy HQ, which then lets you warp to the next Ring Field and repeat the process. When Godzilla or Mothra dies, you can continue playing as the remaining one: if you reach the next Ring Field the deceased will miraculously return to life. ■

FACT

The boss monsters you face are from various Godzilla movies and other films made by its studio, Toho. These include classic Godzilla foes Mechagodzilla and Ghidorah, as well as the likes of fire-breathing dino Baragon from Frankenstein Conquers the World.

GODZILLA 2: WAR OF THE MONSTERS

Year 1992
Publisher Toho
Developer Unknown

IT WOULD APPEAR that someone on Earth has rubbed Godzilla up the wrong way, because he's no longer interested in saving the planet. Instead, he and a bunch of other monsters have all decided to fight each other, damaging the world's major cities in the process. This time, instead of controlling Godzilla, you're now in charge of the army as you try to stop the monsters causing havoc. Rather than side-on brawls you're now dealing with top-down turn-based strategy gameplay, as you issue orders to your army units to try to take down the pesky monsters. The game was criticised for its extremely confusing and seemingly random battle system, which includes a slot machine that is spun each turn in an attempt to increase your abilities. ■

FACT

Godzilla 2 is one of the few NES games released in the western world where the developer remains unknown to this day. Nobody seems to want to claim it for some reason.

GOLF

Year	1985
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo

THIS NES LAUNCH title was the third NES game programmed by the late Satoru Iwata. Nintendo had contacted a number of external developers to see if any of them wanted to make a golf game for the Famicom, but they all declined, saying it would be impossible to fit 18 holes into (what was in the early days) extremely limited memory. 'I heard about that,' Iwata recalled in a 1999 interview, 'and rather recklessly said "I'll do it!"'

Iwata jumped on board and teamed up with Shigeru Miyamoto and Kenji Miki (a new staff member who designed the courses), and the result was the cleverly titled Golf, an 18-hole golf game that continues to influence modern examples of the genre to this day thanks to its revolutionary use of the three-press swing system. Armed with a power bar at the top of the screen, players hit the ball by pressing the A button three times: once to start a cursor going, once to set the power and once to set the accuracy. This means swinging in Golf, as in real life, is all about getting your timing right.

The game's influence is more obviously seen in Nintendo's own Wii Sports, released 21 years later. Along with tennis, boxing, baseball and bowling options, Wii Sports also included a golf course featuring nine holes: these were actually perfect modern-day recreations of the first nine holes in the NES Golf, including the notorious ninth hole with its tiny islands you had to hit the ball onto.

Although Iwata would go on to work on countless other games and eventually become Nintendo's global president before his untimely death, Golf remains an important milestone in his life because it marked an early example of his ability to think outside the box and deliver something his peers felt was impossible. Nintendo paid tribute to this legacy by including Golf as a hidden 'omamori' inside the Nintendo Switch hardware.

FACT

Golf was ported to arcades in two different versions. VS Stroke and Match Golf played similarly to the NES game, complete with Mario lookalike golfer. VS Ladies Golf, meanwhile, replaced 'Mario' with a female golfer.

An omamori is a Japanese amulet, held inside a silk cloth, that acts as a good luck charm: you should never open the omamori, or you'll release the blessing. Because of this, the Switch team hid a perfect version of Golf deep inside the Switch's firmware: players could only trigger it by performing a very specific gesture with the JoyCon, on a specific date (the date of Iwata's death) with the original version 1.0 firmware. Since the Switch updates its firmware the first time you connect it online, it was designed never to be opened, like an omamori should be: it was supposed to be a good luck charm tucked away inside every Switch, as if Iwata was helping guide the system to success. Hackers being what they are, however, a group of data miners found the code hidden away in the Switch's system directory and eventually figured out how to unlock it. Nintendo removed Golf in the next system update, proving once again why we can never have nice things (especially nice things we weren't supposed to know about). ■

GOLF GRAND SLAM

Year	1991
Publisher	Atlus
Developer	Tose

ANOTHER NES GOLF game, but one that goes into much more (unnecessary?) detail than others. Its main mode is Tournament: taking place on the final day of a US golf tournament, you're one of 30 pro golfers all aiming to finish the final 18 holes with the lowest score. Taking a shot involves a surprising number of options: after placing a cursor on the course to mark where you want the ball to land – there's no power bar in this game – you then get to choose your club, your stance, the type of shot you want to hit, the height of your tee (when teeing off) and even the way you grip the club. It's not quite clear how much of this is needed. ■

FACT

The act of actually hitting the ball in Golf Grand Slam is a little less exact. A small target randomly jitters around over the ball, and its location when you press the A button determines where you hit it.

GOLGO 13: TOP SECRET EPISODE

Year	1988
Publisher	Vic Tokai
Developer	Vic Tokai

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN 1968 and still running to this day, *Golgo 13* is the longest-running manga series in history. It's about a professional assassin called Golgo 13, also known by the fake name Duke Togo, and in this NES game he's trying to clear his name after the CIA accuses him of destroying a helicopter carrying a dangerous biological weapon. You have to find the antidote and kill who's really responsible via a series of game types: side-scrolling action platforming, lightgun-style sniping, shoot 'em up sections and maze stages. The mazes are the most difficult aspect of the game and the element that modern gamers complain about most. Those with the boxed game had some help, though, because the manual provides maps for each of the mazes. ■

FACT

In the original Japanese version of the game the organisation responsible is a newly founded Nazi party, but this was changed for the US version. Golgo's profession was also changed from assassin to spy.

THE GOONIES II

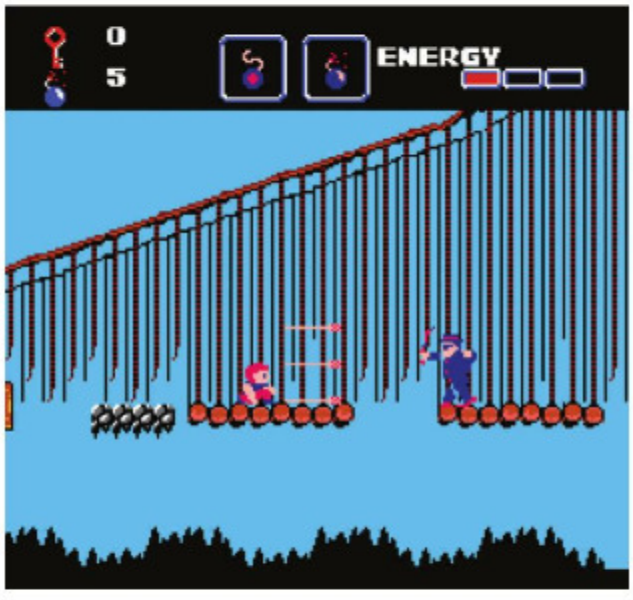
Year	1987
Publisher	Konami
Developer	Konami

DON'T WORRY, THERE wasn't a second Goonies film that somehow passed you by all these years. The Goonies II is actually the sequel to the first Goonies game, which was only released in Japan. The plot in this one's a little odd: Ma Fratelli and her sons have returned and kidnapped most of the Goonies. Mikey's the last one left, so it's up to him to find and rescue all his fellow Goonies… oh, and also his 'good friend', Annie the Mermaid, an actual real-life mermaid who's also been kidnapped for some reason.

Initially accompanied by an 8-bit version of the *Goonies* theme song, *The Goonies R Good Enough* by Cyndi Lauper, you have to explore a series of different locations armed with the likes of your yo-yo, a slingshot and a boomerang. Every now and then the Fratellis turn up (including Cousin Pip Squeek Fratelli, who was never in the movie): though you can't kill

FACT

The first Goonies game, also by Konami, was more difficult (though its puzzles were less obscure). Though it didn't come to the NES, it did end up in Nintendo's Vs System arcade units in America.



them, you can at least stun them for a while. As well as the 2D Metroidvania style sections there are also first-person maze sections, where the player can find and use items. This is where you'll find and rescue the other Goonies (and yes, the weird mermaid too), alhough some of the puzzles in these sections are downright impossible: nobody could ever figure out that in order to gain a candle (an essential item for beating the game) you have to hit an old woman five times, for example. ■

GOTCHA! THE SPORT!

Year	1987
Publisher	LJN
Developer	Atlus

REMEMBER *GOTCHA!*, THE 1985 comedy about an American student who ends up embroiled in a spy mission when he goes on holiday to Germany? Probably not, since it was a huge flop. That didn't stop LJN and Atlus deciding two years later to release an NES Zapper game based on a paintball scene from the start of the film. To its credit, it does try something different: rather than a straight lightgun shooter it's got a Capture the Flag element to it. Holding both the NES controller and the Zapper gun, you use the D-Pad to pan left and right across a paintball field while shooting enemies. The aim is to move to the end of the stage, collect the enemy's flag and return it to your base. ■

FACT

Are you sure you don't remember the film? It had Anthony Edwards from *ER* and Linda Fiorentino from *Men In Black* in it. There's a bit where he shoots a woman in the bum with a tranquiliser dart. No? Ah well then.

GRADIUS

Year	1986
Publisher	Konami
Developer	Konami

ONE OF THE most well-known examples of the horizontally scrolling shoot 'em up genre, Gradius puts players in control of a spaceship called the Vic Viper (referred to as the Warp Rattler in the NES version) as they try to defend the planet Gradius from invasion by the evil Bacterions by heading to their fortress and destroying it. The game's power-up mechanic has you collecting red power capsules, which you 'bank' at the top of the screen until you reach the power-up you want, at which point you press B to activate it. Gradius is also notable for being the first ever game to feature the Konami Code, a cheat code that appeared in many Konami games. Here, it gives you a bunch of instant power-ups. ■

FACT

Although the Vic Viper has appeared in a large number of Konami shoot 'em ups, there are actually eight different models of Vic Viper, with different weapons and abilities. The one in Gradius is the most basic, the Vic Viper BP-456X.

THE GREAT WALDO SEARCH

Year	1992
Publisher	THQ
Developer	Radiance Software

BASED ON THE third book in the *Where's Waldo* series (known as *Where's Wally? The Fantastic Journey* in its native UK), The Great Waldo Search presents players with five different scenes from the book – The Carpet Flyers, The Underground Hunters, The Battling Monks, The Unfriendly Giants and The Land of Waldos – and asks them to find Waldo and a magical scroll in every stage. Clocks can also be found to give you more time, while small plates give you extra points and finding Waldo's dog Woof takes you to a bonus stage where even more points can be racked up. The game is underwhelming, because despite being more expensive it couldn't match the actual books for detail, number of scenes or things to look for. ■

FACT

The Great Waldo Search was remade many years later as Where's Waldo? The Fantastic Journey and released on Wii, DS, PC and mobile. Though it was more fun to play with pointer controls, it was still very limited.

GREG NORMAN'S GOLF POWER

Year	1992
Publisher	Virgin Interactive
Developer	Gremlin Graphics

THE LAST GOLF game to be released for the NES, Golf Power was endorsed by Australian golfer Greg Norman, who spent 331 weeks as the world's number one ranked golfer throughout the '80s and '90s. There are nine courses available to play through – USA, Japan, England, Scotland, Germany, Spain, France, Australia and Hawaii – but Golf Power's main selling point is the Designer mode, which lets you create your own course and save it to the cartridge to play with your friends later (it also supports the NES Four Score for four-player gameplay). Its wonderful title music sounds very non-NES: it was composed by Scottish musician Barry Leitch, who was better known for C64 music, and has a similarly 'chirpy' 8-bit home computer sound. ■

FACT

Norman also lent his name to Greg Norman's Shark Attack! for the Amiga. Don't get too excited, though, as it's still just a golf game. The Shark was Norman's nickname, you see.

GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH

Year 1990
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft

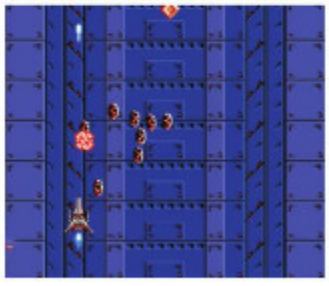
THE FIRST *GREMLINS* movie was perhaps a little too dark to be considered kid-friendly, but that certainly wasn't the case with the sequel, which leant far more to the comedy genre than horror. Cue the NES game, which loosely follows the plot of *The New Batch* as Gizmo escapes the genetics lab in the Clamp Centre and realises it's been overrun by Gremlins. Taking place over nine stages, this top-down action adventure game arms Gizmo with a bunch of improvised weaponry, ranging from a bow and arrow (a rubber band attached to two paper clips that fires pencils) to a flash bulb which kills every Gremlin on the screen (remember, don't expose them to bright light). The final battle is against a mutated Mohawk / spider hybrid. ■

FACT

Sunsoft also released a Gremlins 2 game for the Game Boy, but it was completely different. Rather than a top-down adventure, it was a side-scrolling platformer.

THE GUARDIAN LEGEND

Year 1989
Publisher Broderbund / Nintendo
Developer Compile



A MASSIVE PLANET called Naju is hurtling towards Earth, and it's loaded with a bunch of vicious creatures. As the Guardian of Earth (no pressure), you land on Naju and have to destroy it before impact. There are two stage types here: when you're on Naju's surface the action consists of a series of top-down labyrinth sections, similar to Blaster Master's top-down stages. There are then a series of underground sections where you jump into your ship and try to blast the planet from the inside: these take the form of vertically-scrolling shoot 'em up stages and are generally agreed to be the best part of the game. It's actually a sequel to the Japan-only game Guardic, and is known there as Guardic Gaiden. ■

FACT

One of the writers for US magazine *EGM* hated the labyrinth sections so much that in his review he gave a password (TGL) that let players skip them and only play the shooting stages.

GUERRILLA WAR

Year 1989
Publisher SNK
Developer SNK

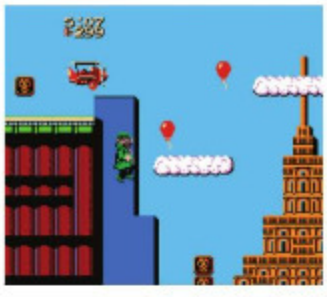
THE NES VERSION of SNK's Ikari Warriors was heavily criticised for its fairly sedate pace: its hero character moves agonisingly slowly through each stage. Its follow-up, Guerrilla War, makes up for this by improving your walking speed, while also turning the action up to 11 and retaining simultaneous two-player. As a result, it's fair to say this is the superior NES title. It's a top-down run-and-gun game, something SNK was well-known for, in which you play as a guerilla leader as he tries to save his small island country from an evil dictator. In case you're wondering what the real-life inspiration is, the uncensored Japanese version makes it perfectly clear: set in Cuba, players one and two are Che Guevara and Fidel Castro respectively. ■

FACT

The arcade version used a twin-stick system where players could move in one direction and shoot in another. The NES version obviously ditched this, but the game didn't suffer for it.

GUMSHOE

Year 1986
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1



MR STEVENSON IS a private detective, but he used to work for the FBI and his past has caught up to him. His daughter Jennifer has been kidnapped, and the ransom is the five rare Black Panther diamonds, which are hidden all over the world. Gumshoe is an interesting attempt at making a platform game that's controlled with the Zapper. The game auto-scrolls to the right and Mr Stevenson walks forward at the same speed: the player has to shoot enemies and obstacles around him, but they can also shoot him to make him jump. You have a limited number of bullets, but Mr Stevenson can collect red balloons to give you more ammo. This encourages players to keep him moving around, instead of focusing solely on enemies. ■

FACT

In the Official Nintendo Player's Guide released in 1987, Mr Stevenson is referred to as R. L. Stevenson. This suggests he's based on Robert Louis Stevenson, the author of *Kidnapped*.

GUN-NAC

Year 1991
Publisher ASCII Corporation
Developer Compile

IOTA SYNTHETIC USED to be one of the most hip and happening solar systems in the entire universe, and anyone living there was more or less guaranteed a prosperous existence. That is, until one day a strange cosmic energy engulfed the entire system, turning all animals, plants and inanimate objects into sentient killing machines. It's up to Commander Gun-Nac to climb into his ship and save the day by pumping countless bullets into these animated swines. Gun-Nac is a fairly straightforward vertically-scrolling shoot 'em up, where players can upgrade their weapons and bombs as they progress. Enemies range from giant rabbits to the moon itself, which seems a little counter-intuitive when your aim is to save the solar system, not destroy important parts of it. ■

FACT

Gun-Nac is actually a parody of Zanac, a more serious shooter also developed by Compile. Both games are similar, though Zanac is distinctly light on killer rabbits.

GUN.SMOKE

Year 1988
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

VERTICAL SHOOT 'EM ups set in space were ten a penny in the '80s and '90s, as you can see by flicking through this book. Gun.Smoke cleverly bucked this trend by replacing the stars with sand, and swapping your spaceship for a six-shooter. Playing as a cowboy called Billie Bob (apparently nobody told Capcom that Billie is the female spelling), you wander through the town of Hicksville, gunning down varmints in an attempt to reach and kill various wanted gang members. Gun.Smoke features an interesting shooting system: the B and A buttons fire shots diagonally to the left and right, while pressing them both at the same time fires straight forward. You can also call on a horse, which offers extra protection. ■

FACT

The reason Gun.Smoke has that awkward dot in the middle of its name is because there was a western TV series called *Gunsmoke* which ran from from 1955–75. The dot is to make it 'clear' the game isn't based on it.

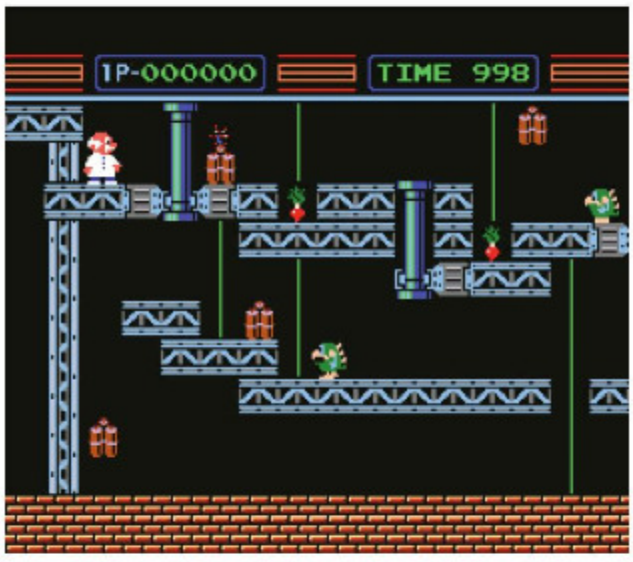
GYROMITE

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1

GYROMITE IS BEST known not for the game itself but the lovable, terrible robot that came with it. This was the game that came bundled with R.O.B., the Robotic Operating Buddy that acted as a Trojan horse to make the NES appeal to retailers during the video game crash. The game tells the story of Professor Hector (or Professor Vector, if you're player two). He has to collect all the dynamite in his lab before time runs out, but there are a series of columns blocking his way. R.O.B. can move these pillars by picking up gyroscopes in the real world, spinning them on a worryingly powerful spinning machine (this was pre-fidget spinners, kids) and placing them on coloured pedestals in front of him: this in turn moves the pillars in the game world. The player switches between the Professor and R.O.B. by pressing the Start button: this makes the Prof turn to face the screen, at which point you're in control of R.O.B. and can issue commands to him. There's also a Game B mode where Professor Hector is sleepwalking, meaning the player only has to control R.O.B. and doesn't have to worry about switching between the characters. Gyromite was actually a fun idea, it was just let down by the limitations of R.O.B. and his painfully slow movement. Picking up and putting down gyros took an age, not to mention spinning them always felt quite dangerous. ■

FACT

Early Gyromite cartridges actually contained the circuit board from the Japanese Famicom version, attached to an adaptor so it could run on an NES. These adaptors can be removed from the cart and used to play Famicom games on the NES.



GYRUSS

Year 1989
Publisher Ultra Games
Developer Konami

IT IS THE year 25XX and mankind 'must rid the universe of evil': a task that sounds a bit much, to be fair. You do this by flying to each of the planets in our solar system, destroying enemies along the way. Rather than a straight scrolling shoot 'em up, Gyruss is similar to the likes of Atari's Tempest in that your ship is locked on a circular axis. Moving left and right rotates your ship around the screen, and you fire down different 'paths' towards the centre. Gyruss differs from the arcade game it's based on by adding a bunch of extra stages: while the arcade version only covers six planets the NES game includes all nine before ending at the Sun. ■

FACT

Gyruss also includes the Konami code (it lets you start with 30 lives), but unlike in most other Konami games you have to enter it backwards.

HAMMERIN' HARRY

Year 1992
Publisher Irem
Developer Irem

YOU MAY NOT be too familiar with Hammerin' Harry, but he's appeared in at least 10 games in Japan over the years. This NES offering is a port of the arcade game of the same name, and stars a young hammer-wielding chap eager to get his own back on the Rusty Nail Construction Company after they demolished his home. As well as bashing bad guys with his hammer, Harry can also thwack other objects across the screen and hit his enemies with them. It's got a wonderfully bizarre sense of humour – the final boss is an evil businessman who zooms around in a flying wheelchair throwing razor-tipped dollar bills at you – and is a bit of a hidden gem given its Europe-only release. ■

FACT

PSP fans in the west may be more familiar with a later game in the series: Hammerin' Hero (also known as GenSan in Europe) is one of the few games given an English translation.

HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS

Year 1991
Publisher GameTek
Developer Softie

USUALLY YOU'D EXPECT a sports title to include more than just exhibition games, but when you're dealing with one based on a team that does nothing but exhibition games, you can maybe understand why there's nothing else on offer. That's the case with Harlem Globetrotters, the NES game dedicated to those zany funsters who tour the world playing comedy, trick-filled basketball games. Naturally, you can choose to play as the Globetrotters and pull off silly moves, like pulling the referee's trousers down or kicking the ball into the basket. Alternatively, you can do away with such frivolities and choose to play as their long-time rivals, the Washington Generals, who play a more straight-laced game. Either way, once it's over it's back to the title screen. ■

FACT

The Washington Generals was the 'straight' team that toured with the Globetrotters. Naturally they lost every game, but one night in 1971, playing as the New Jersey Reds, they accidentally won and the crowd was devastated.

HATRIS

Year 1992
Publisher Bullet-Proof Software
Developer Bullet-Proof Software

AFTER THE ENORMOUS worldwide success of Tetris, Bullet-Proof Software – who owned the licence and sub-licensed it to Nintendo – hoped its creator Alexey Pajitnov could make lighting strike twice. His next attempt was Hatris, a puzzler in which hats of different shapes and sizes fall to the ground and the player has to stack five in a row to make them disappear. The gimmick is that each hat stacks differently: top hats make large stacks, while you can pile a load of baseball caps on top of each other without it resulting in a massive stack. Hatris was an interesting concept but it was noticeably more difficult than Tetris and wasn't as immediately accessible, and as a result it reached nowhere near the same level of success. ■

FACT

Hatris wasn't the only attempt Pajitnov made to strike gold again. Welltris, Wordtris, Faces, Hexic, Dwice and Ice & Fire were all created by Pajitnov over the years, with varying results.

HEAVY BARREL

Year	1990
Publisher	Data East
Developer	Data East

TERRORISTS HAVE SEIZED the underground control complex of a nuclear missile site, which is far from ideal. You have to infiltrate the site and kill their leader before they can launch the missiles. It's a difficult mission, but one made a lot easier by Heavy Barrel, a super weapon that can destroy almost every enemy with a single shot. You'll need to earn it, though. As you shoot your way through the game you'll collect keys: these open lockers, some of which contain pieces of Heavy Barrel. Once you find six pieces you can assemble the gun and cause carnage for 99 seconds, at which point it falls apart and you need to build another one. The game also includes a two-player co-op mode. ■

FACT

The irony of using a super weapon to prevent another super weapon from being fired isn't lost on the developers. When you beat the game a message reads: 'Dismantle your secret weapon. You saved the land from disaster.'

HEAVY SHREDDIN'

Year	1990
Publisher	Parker Brothers / Activision
Developer	Imagineering

BETTER KNOWN AS Snowboard Challenge in Europe and Australia, Heavy Shreddin' is a snowboarding game with 18 levels set across five different disciplines. Downhill is a timed race where you have to quickly reach the bottom, while Slalom requires you to pass through flags on the way down. Half-pipe is more about gaining points by doing jumps, while Moguls has you hopping over a bump-riddled circuit. The most difficult stage, however, is the Backwoods: this features 23 different obstacles – ranging from hay bales and rope fences to trucks and waterfalls – which each have to be bypassed in a different way. Heavy Shreddin' was criticised for its extremely simplistic graphics and its awkward viewpoint which wasn't quite side-on and wasn't quite isometric. ■

FACT

In case you're not aware, 'shredding' is snowboard lingo for going down a hill (presumably because the board shreds the snow). If you really want to be 'rad', you could call it 'shreddin' the gnar' instead. But please don't.

HIGH SPEED

Year	1991
Publisher	Tradewest
Developer	Rare

HIGH SPEED WAS an iconic pinball machine released in 1986. It was notable for being, among other things, the first pinball machine to play a complete song and the first to feature a 'jackpot' feature during multi-ball. Five years later, Rare recreated High Speed for the NES, with the manual proudly boasting that 'one of the hottest pinball machines ever has now been converted to video'. In reality, High Speed was actually based on a real-life police chase its designer experienced. While driving a Porsche 928, he was pursued by the police for speeding at up to 146 mph. The pinball table may have been iconic, but it should come as no surprise that it's not quite as exhilarating (or downright stupid) as the real thing probably was. ■

FACT

High Speed was recreated a second time, as a downloadable table in The Pinball Arcade by FarSight Studios. At the time of writing it's available on Xbox One, PS4, PC, mobile and a number of legacy systems.

HOGAN'S ALLEY

Year	1985
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Intelligent Systems

THIS NES LAUNCH game offered more Zapper gameplay for those early adopters who wanted more than just Duck Hunt. It consists of three game types: Game A is a police-style shooting range where you have to shoot criminals and avoid the innocents (a lady, a professor and a policeman). Game B does the same thing, but moves the action to a street scene where characters appear in windows. Finally, Game C is a 'Trick Shooting' mode, where you have to keep shooting cans to juggle them in the air and try to guide them over to platforms on the left side of the screen. Game A was a microgame in the GBA, GameCube and DS WarioWare games, while Game C was a boss battle in the DS version. ■

FACT

The Duck Hunt character in Super Smash Bros. for Wii U and 3DS has a special move which makes a tin can from Game C appear. Each time you press the B button the can bounces as if it's been shot.

HOLLYWOOD SQUARES

Year 1989
Publisher GameTek
Developer Rare

HOLLYWOOD SQUARES SHOULDN'T work as a video game: it's a game show in which celebrities are asked trivia questions, and all the contestant has to do is decide if they're right or wrong. Surprisingly, though… nah, only joking, it really doesn't work as a video game. To its credit, Rare did its best with the source material: each of the 400 questions has a different right and wrong answer, and each 'celebrity' (they're just nine random characters) actually gives a jokey fake response (usually a terrible one, but occasionally a zinger) before giving their real answer, just like in the show. For example, when asked what distinguishes vultures from other large birds of prey, your chosen celebrity answers: 'Vultures operate primarily in Hollywood.' ■

FACT

Another Hollywood Squares game was released on the Wii, PS3, PC and iOS in 2010. Unlike the NES game, it featured video clips from actual celebrities: Brad Garrett, Kathy Griffin, Martin Mull and Jeffrey Tambor.

HOME ALONE

Year 1991
Publisher THQ
Developer Bethesda Softworks

KEVIN MCALLISTER'S FAMILY has gone on holiday without him, and the nasty Wet Bandits are trying to break into his house so they can burgle it. Kevin's called the cops but they won't be there for 20 minutes, so you have to survive until they arrive by planting traps around the house and trying to avoid being captured. Kevin can only carry three traps with him at any time, so it's important to make sure you have a steady supply. The game's manual overdoes it a bit when discussing the enemy AI, claiming that it's 'extremely intelligent', and that 'being smart enables them to track Kevin down in a way that is unique to the Nintendo Entertainment System library of enemy characters'. It's not that impressive. ■

FACT

Oddly, there are two different versions of Home Alone. One has a Game Over screen showing Kevin doing the classic *Home Alone* 'scream' pose and saying 'oh no', while the other simply says 'oh no' with no picture of Kevin.

HOME ALONE 2: LOST IN NEW YORK

Year 1992
Publisher THQ
Developer Imagineering

KEVIN'S BEEN ABANDONED by his parents again (they really need to get a social worker involved now), and this time he's stranded in New York. He needs to escape the Trump Plaza hotel while avoiding the angry staff (thanks, Trump), make his way through a dark and scary Central Park, reach his uncle's townhouse, climb to the roof, then make it back to street level for a dash to the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree, all while the newly-renamed Sticky Bandits are hot on his tail. With less emphasis on traps, Home Alone 2 is more of an action platformer as Kevin has a dart gun he can use to stun enemies. It's generally considered a bad game with awkward controls and off-putting music. ■

FACT

Beating the game reunites Kevin with his parents. 'Have you got something against spending Christmas with your family?' his dad jokes. You're the one who ditched him, you swine.

HOOK

Year 1992
Publisher Sony Imagesoft / Ocean
Developer Painting by Numbers

THERE WERE NO fewer than four completely different games created to tie in with the Spielberg-directed Peter Pan movie starring Robin Williams. The NES game is a side-scrolling action platformer where Peter has to rescue his children from Captain Hook by heading to Neverland and collecting four special items needed to defeat him: an alarm clock, a horn, a tooth and a magic sword. Each stage requires you to collect a certain amount of items – cherries, cakes, pearls and such – before you can exit and move onto the next. Peter's rubbish at fighting, but he can summon Tinkerbell to defeat enemies for him. There are also flying sections between stages, where you have to keep collecting marbles to stay up in the air. ■

FACT

The other versions of Hook were a beat' em up arcade game, a point-and-click adventure (Amiga and Atari ST) and a completely different platformer (SNES, Mega Drive, Mega CD and Game Gear). The NES version was also ported to the Game Boy and C64.

HOOPS

Year 1989
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Aicom

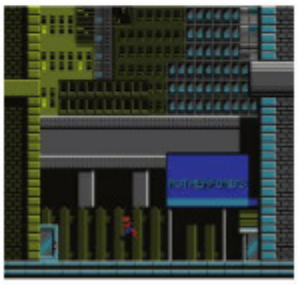
A STREET BASKETBALL game offering either one-on-one or two-on-two games. There are eight different characters to choose from – ranging from the all-round star Mr Doc to the small but speedy Barbie – and you can take part in either a standard 'first to X points' match or a game of 'Around the World', where players take turns trying to score baskets from various points on the court. Given the nature of the contests mean only one basket is used, the game's camera is locked to one half of the court. There's also a 15-game tournament mode, which can either be played alone or in co-op with a friend: completing this shows an ending screen revealing what happened to each character years later. ■

FACT

Much like Double Dribble, Hoops has slow-motion dunking cutscenes. However, here they can sometimes result in opponents managing to jump up and block them, so they're not a sure thing.

HUDSON HAWK

Year 1992
Publisher Sony Imagesoft / Ocean
Developer Ocean



MOVIE TIE-INS ARE always a gamble: If the film ends up being a massive flop, fewer people are going to be interested in playing the game. This was the problem facing Hudson Hawk, based on the Bruce Willis action comedy that ended up making back a only quarter of its budget and winning three Razzie awards for worst film, screenplay and director. The game is a side-scrolling platformer where Hawk has to collect artifacts created by Leonardo da Vinci, in order to stop Mayflower Industries building a machine that turns lead into gold. Because nothing says action like trying to save the world's economy. The game isn't terrible, but Hawk's puny jump and odd weapon throwing arc make it more frustrating than it needs to be. ■

FACT

The game's poor design is best explained in the manual: 'When moving forward, keep tossing a softball ahead of you. You might knock out enemies before you see them. Sometimes by the time you see them, it's too late!'

THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER

Year 1991
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer Beam Software

ANOTHER MOVIE TIE-IN, this time based on the 1990 spy thriller starring Sean Connery. Playing as a Russian defector, your task is to take the Red October – a Soviet nuclear submarine armed to the gills – and guide it to the safety of an American port before the Kremlin realises what you're doing and destroys your sub. The majority of the game consists of side-scrolling underwater combat. Navigating a series of deep sea tunnels, you have to fire torpedoes and missiles to take out enemies. Oddly, the NES version ends on quite a tangent, throwing a random platforming stage at you and asking you to gun down a bunch of bad guys in something that wouldn't look out of place in a James Bond game. ■

FACT

The *Hunt for Red October* is the first movie to feature the Jack Ryan character, who was played in later movies by Harrison Ford, Ben Affleck, Chris Pine and John Krasinski.

HYDLIDE

Year 1989
Publisher FCI
Developer Technology & Entertainment Software

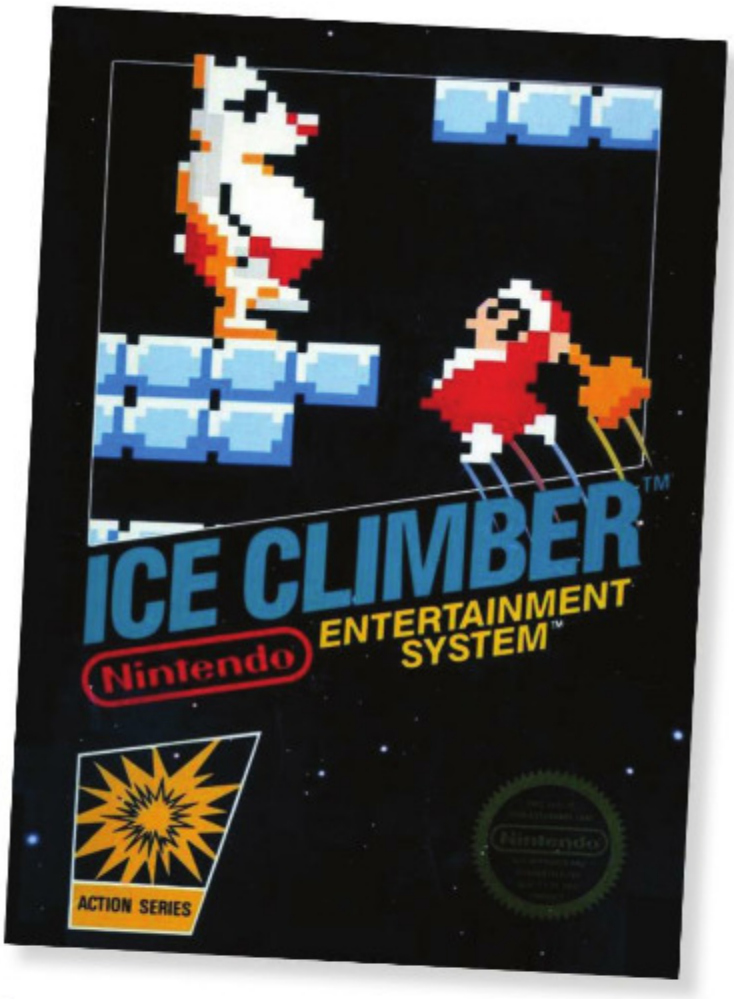
THERE AREN'T ENOUGH heroes in games simply called Jim. Thankfully, Hydlide exists to fill that Jim-shaped void in every gamer's heart. Jim has to recover three magic jewels which have been stolen from Fairyland, and in doing so rescue Princess Ann from the evil Boralis. Hydlide is an open-world RPG where all combat is automatic: Jim has a life bar, as do enemies, and you simply run into them until one bar runs out. The A and B buttons switch between 'attack' and 'defend' mode, which essentially affect the speed at which each power bar goes down. It's a very basic concept, but one that makes the typical RPG grind when gaining experience far less time-consuming. Its music will drill into your brain. ■

FACT

Hydlide was a big success in Japan, where it was released on a number of different NEC, MSX and Fujitsu home computers. It sold 2 million copies across all platforms.

ICE CLIMBER

Year	1985
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D1



ARGUABLY THE MOST difficult game in the NES launch line-up, Ice Climber is a vertical-scrolling platformer where the player has to reach the top of 32 mountains, each containing all manner of tricky jumps and enemies. The protagonists are Popo and Nana, a pair of parka-wearing mountaineers armed with big wooden mallets. These mallets can be used to attack any enemies that come near, but more importantly they're also used to smash blocks above you.

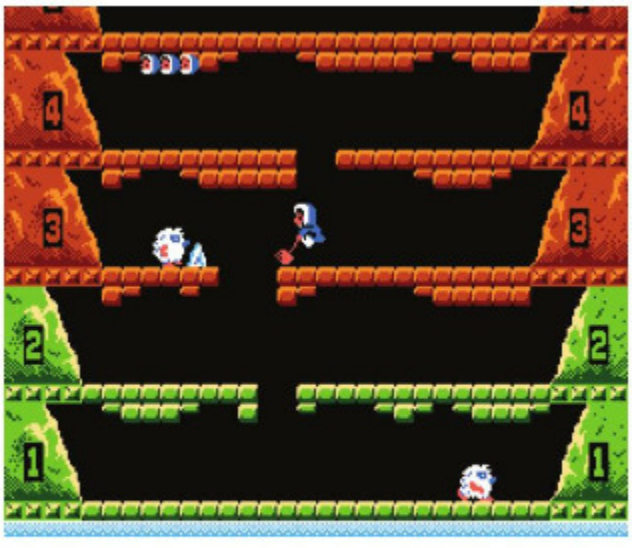
This is crucial because jumping upwards is the only way to progress in the game, and it's this upwards jump that makes Ice Climber such a tricky game to adapt to (even for a modern gamer). Popo and Nana jump with an extremely high arc, meaning they go almost straight upwards and not very far to the side. This is ideal for knocking out small gaps in the blocks above you, then jumping upwards through them and landing slightly to the side. This does, however, make the platforming sections – where moving cloud-shaped platforms travel from side to side – a little trickier to navigate. The fact that the bonus stages feature platforms and nothing else shows that successfully hopping between them was considered an achievement in itself.

The Japanese and western versions of Ice Climber have one major difference, in that one particular enemy is completely different. The Japanese game features enemies called Topi, which are essentially small blue seals that waddle around, filling holes in the ice and generally causing problems until you thwack them with your mallet. The western language versions kept the Topi enemy, but since the clubbing of seals was a hot topic in the 1980s with numerous protests and political campaigns, the Topi was completely redesigned to resemble a sort of Yeti instead.

FACT

When you think of bundled NES games you usually think of titles like Super Mario Bros. and Duck Hunt. In fact, for a while NES consoles in West Germany, Switzerland and Austria were instead bundled with Ice Climber.

Other enemies that feature in all versions include the Nitpicker (a small bird that flies around hassling you), the Condor (a larger bird that can give you bonus points if you're able to jump up and grab onto it) and the Polar Bear, which appears when the game wants you to hurry up and pushes the stage upwards.



Ice Climber was a relatively well-received game, but it was forgotten over time as the Marios, Zeldas, Metroids and such grew in popularity. It did enjoy a comeback in 2001, however, when Popo and Nana were added as playable characters in Super Smash Bros. Melee for the GameCube. This surprise return led to many newer gamers finding out about Ice Climber for the first time, and they became such a well-loved pair that they came back for the Wii Smash Bros. in 2008, along with their own stage featuring the return of the Polar Bear.

While Ice Climber may not be a game that's immediately cited when fans round off lists of classic NES games, it retains a die-hard fanbase to this day and many gamers continue to keep their fingers crossed that – unlikely as it may be – Popo and Nana may get the chance to return in a new adventure one day. ■

ICE HOCKEY

Year 1988
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D2

ANOTHER OF NINTENDO'S wonderfully generic-named sports titles. Ice Hockey, you won't be surprised to discover, is an ice hockey game for one or two players. There are six teams to choose from: USA, Czechoslovakia, Canada, Poland, the Soviet Union and Sweden (who replace Japan, who were in the Famicom version). The game itself is as you would expect from a hockey game, but while it only consists of exhibition matches there is one particularly interesting feature: once you've chosen your team you can choose whether each of your four players are skinny, medium build or chubby. This does actually have an effect on the game: heavy players have powerful shots and body checks, but they're also slow and poor during face-offs. ■

FACT

It seems the chubby player had a fan somewhere in Nintendo, because he made a cameo appearance in Super Smash Bros. Brawl as one of the game's collectible stickers.

IKARI WARRIORS

Year 1987
Publisher SNK
Developer Micronics

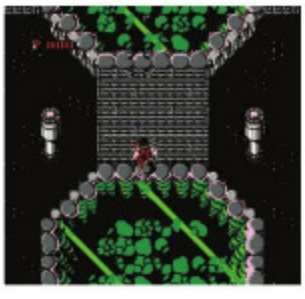
PAUL AND VINCE are a pair of commandos who have been given secret orders to invade an unnamed enemy nation and reach the village of Ikari by filling anyone who opposes them with bullets. The game's a vertically-scrolling run-and-gun shooter – something SNK would go on to become renowned for in the following years – which players can either take on alone or with a friend. From time to time you can jump into a tank for increased firepower and protection. It's well-known for its badly written end message, after you rescue General Kawasak (named after SNK's founder): 'You have accomplished the mission. You are the very prevailer that protect right and justice. I would express my sincere. Thanks to you. Take good rest!' ■

FACT

The heroes Paul and Vince are instead known as Ralf and Clark in the Japanese version of the game. They later appeared as playable fighters in SNK's King of Fighters series.

IKARI WARRIORS II: VICTORY ROAD

Year 1988
Publisher SNK
Developer Micronics



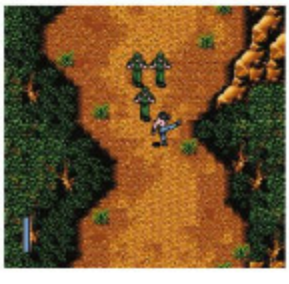
WHEN YOUR FIRST game is about commandos fighting through a jungle to rescue their colonel, it takes guts to pull a massive swerve for the sequel. That's what happens in Ikari Warriors II. As Paul and Vince fly home after a mission well done, the sky suddenly turns black and a voice booms through the radio, telling them that 'Zang Zip, the War Dog, has enslaved the people of Earth'. You're then sent thousands of years in the future and have to destroy the evil alien menace. While the general run-and-gun action is the same, there are a couple of changes here. Gone are the tanks (do they have tanks in the distant future?), replaced by body armour. You can also now collect money to upgrade your weapons. ■

FACT

You only get one life in Ikari Warriors II, but you can get around that by pressing A, B, B, A before the Game Over screen appears to continue where you left off (except in the final stage).

IKARI III: THE RESCUE

Year 1991
Publisher SNK
Developer SNK



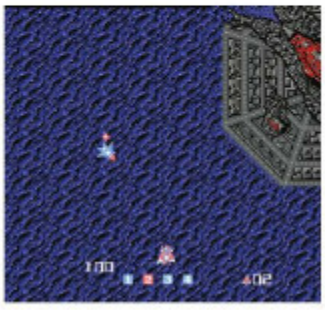
WELL, IT LOOKS like they aren't warriors anymore. Despite this, Paul and Vince are very much up for another mission, and this time the president's daughter Elise has been kidnapped by Faust, the leader of a secret organisation called Crime Ghost. Whereas the first two Ikari Warriors games were very much considered shooters, Ikari III dials back the gunplay significantly and for the most part you'll be fighting hand-to-hand instead. While the first two games were criticised for their poor NES ports, Ikari III is believed to be even better than its arcade counterpart: the hit detection is improved and there's a whole extra stage, an auto-scrolling vertical shooter where you swim through an area in scuba gear, firing a gun (hooray!) at enemies. ■

FACT

Unlike the second game, Ikari III does away with the cheat code formality and just gives you infinite continues (even on the last stage). This means you can easily beat the game if you're simply stubborn enough to keep continuing.

IMAGE FIGHT

Year	1990
Publisher	Irem
Developer	Irem



IN THE YEAR 20XX (so much happened that year, according to gaming) the moon explodes into four large fragments and a bunch of meteors. The reason? Aliens from the Boondoggle Galaxy destroyed the base we built on the moon, kicking off their attempt to take over Earth. The world's best scientists combine forces to create the OF-1 fighter ship: you have to board it and defeat the invaders to 'earn everlasting glory'.

Image Fight is a vertical shooter with a clever level progression system: the first five levels are all computer simulations to see if you're ready to take on the alien menace. Only once you get an average score of 90 per cent in these stages do you get to take on the final three 'real' stages. ■

FACT

In 2003 Irem released R-Type Final on PS2. It was a side-scrolling shooter with a ridiculous 101 ships to unlock and play as. One of these ships was none other than the OF-1.

THE IMMORTAL

Year	1990
Publisher	EA
Developer	Sandcastle

YOU ARE A nameless wizard, standing in the first room of a labyrinth. An image of your mentor Mordamir flickers from a nearby candle and says: 'Dunric, you have come to save me.' Your name isn't Dunric but you decide to head into the labyrinth to find him anyway. The Immortal is an isometric adventure game where you can defeat enemies in two ways. Your fireball attack lets you take them out from a distance, but if you get too close the action cuts to a close-up hand-to-hand section where you can dodge and attack your enemies. The Immortal was notorious for being extremely gory on other systems: that gore has been seriously cut back for the NES version, with nary an exploding head in sight. ■

FACT

Developer Sandcastle consisted of the game's creator Will Harvey and three other members. Before making The Immortal, the team originally formed to make Zany Golf for home computers (and later the Mega Drive).

THE INCREDIBLE CRASH DUMMIES

Year	1993
Publisher	LJN
Developer	Software Creations

ONE OF THE odder action figure lines of the early '90s, Tyco's Incredible Crash Dummies was a series of toys based on the dummies used in public service announcements for car safety. The tie-in game is a run-of-the-mill platformer starring Slick and Spin, the main heroes, as they try to rescue their friends Spare Tire, Darryl and Bumper from the evil Junkman. Since the idea of characters who love being in car crashes was a tad close to the bone, the game and its manual are filled with reminders that you should always wear your seat belt, right down to a quiz at the end of the manual. Q: 'What's the one thing a person who doesn't use safety belts will never see?' A: 'Old age.' ■

FACT

Amazingly, one of the action figures was a baby in a car seat called Skid the Kid. Parents protested at the idea of a toy baby designed to be in car crashes, and it was eventually pulled off the shelves.

INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

Year	1988
Publisher	Mindscape
Developer	Tengen

INDIANA JONES' FIRST adventure on the NES is based on the much-loved second movie in the film series. It takes place during the second act, where Indy has discovered that the village's missing children are being forced to work as slaves to mine for the final two powerful Sankara Stones. The game consists of 12 'waves' and has Indy fighting his way through the palace, rescuing children along the way, in an attempt to get hold of the Sankara Stones (in wave 9) then proceed to escape the palace, cross the film's infamous rope bridge and battle Mola Ram. Despite featuring a reasonable rendition of John Williams' iconic theme music, the basic visuals and clunky controls meant there weren't many massive fans of this game. ■

FACT

You can blame *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (the movie) for every mine cart level you've ever played in a video game. The iconic scene where Indy, Willie and Short Round escape on a cart inspired countless imitators.

INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

Year 1991
Publisher Taito
Developer Software Creations

BASED ON THE third Indy movie, The Last Crusade follows our hero as he tries to find the Holy Grail. It's a fairly story-heavy game with a number of cut-scenes featuring detailed pictures of the cast from the movie. Players get to choose the order in which they visit each of the game's levels, and since the difficulty raises each time you beat a stage this means they can start by visiting the levels they struggle with more. Levels range from side-scrolling action platforming stages set on a ship, a castle and a tank, to a sliding puzzle where you try to find out what the grail looks like, to even a top-down section where you have to spell out 'JEHOVAH' on floor tiles as in the film's climax. ■

FACT

The 'JEHOVAH' section actually contradicts the film. In the movie, Indy nearly falls to his doom when he steps on the 'J', before realising that in the Latin alphabet it's actually 'IEHOVAH'.

INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

Year 1993
Publisher Ubisoft
Developer NMS Software

UBISOFT RELEASED ITS own Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade game two years after Taito's, in a move that doubtless confused many an American gamer (not so much in Europe, which didn't get the Taito game). This one is a port of 1989's Last Crusade: The Action Game, previously released on home computers and consoles by US Gold. It's more conventional than Taito's effort, instead offering six stages of standard platforming action as Indy fights his way through a number of stages in search of the Cross of Coronado, a shield, your dad's Grail Diary and finally the Holy Grail itself. It ends with a far simpler version of the 'JEHOVA' puzzle, but this time it sticks closer to the movie by spelling it 'IEHOVA' instead. ■

FACT

This version was originally called The Action Game on other systems, because there was also a point-and-click Last Crusade title released at the same time called The Adventure Game.

INFILTRATOR

Year 1990
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Gray Matter

INFILTRATOR WAS A part-helicopter sim, part third-person adventure game released for home computers in 1986. This is not that game. Instead, this is a port of Infiltrator II, renamed for the NES to make up for the fact it didn't get its predecessor. It's a similar game, though: playing as the ridiculously named Captain Johnny 'Jimbo-Baby' McGibbits, you have to stop The Mad Leader from taking over the world by taking part in three helicopter missions and three enemy base missions. The chopper stages are first-person flight sim levels where you have to gun down enemies in your Whizbang Enterprizes Gizmo DHX-3 Attack Helicopter (yes, really), while the base missions have you exploring each base to complete objectives while up against a strict time limit. ■

FACT

Just to complete the collection of silly names in Infiltrator, your boss goes by the name of Brigadier General Bunson 'Old Blood 'n Guts' O'Shaughnessy.

INTERNATIONAL CRICKET

Year 1992
Publisher Laser Beam Entertainment
Developer Beam Software

MUCH LIKE AUSSIE Rules Footy before it, International Cricket was another game dreamt up by NES distributor Mattel – via Melbourne studio Beam Software – in an attempt to get Australians more interested in the system. As with Aussie Rules, too, it wasn't released outside of Oz. The game features eight international teams covering all the major test cricket nations: Australia, England, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the West Indies. As well as exhibition matches there's also a World Series mode, where you have to win two matches in a row to win a trophy. The game didn't have an official licence, but player names were suspiciously similar to real ones (or cleverly related, like G. Swamp instead of Geoff Marsh). ■

FACT

Beam Software developed a bit of a reputation for cricket games. Super International Cricket came to the NES in 1994, before EA Sports enlisted the studio to make Cricket 96 and Cricket 97.

IRON TANK: THE INVASION OF NORMANDY

Year	1988
Publisher	SNK
Developer	SNK

ON 5 JUNE 1944, the United Forces are preparing their final assault on the Normandy Coast. They decide on a (slightly non-canon) plan: get one guy called Paul to drive a tank through the front lines and destroy the enemy's HQ. Thankfully, Paul is actually from Command Unit 88, a special outfit known as Iron Snake. And his tank isn't any old M4, it's the United Forces' strongest juggernaut, the Iron Tank. Cue a vertically scrolling run-and-gun game (well, roll-and-gun) similar to some of SNK's other arcade offerings. The tank's turret can be rotated by pressing A and a D-Pad direction together: this lets you lock your turret attacks to one direction while firing your tank's machine gun in another direction. ■

FACT

Iron Tank is less linear than most games of its type. The player can choose different paths to go down, allowing for completely different routes to the end of the game. Some are shorter, but harder as a result.

IRONSWORD: WIZARDS & WARRIORS II

Year	1989
Publisher	Acclaim
Developer	Zippo Games

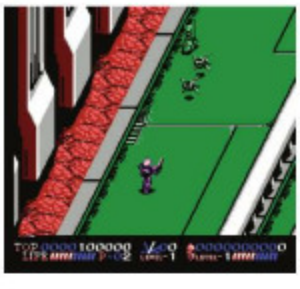
RARE'S 1987 GAME Wizards & Warriors was enough of a success to warrant a sequel, so Rare called on the services of UK developers Ste and John Pickford – known at the time as Zippo Games – to make the follow-up. Ironsword continues the adventures of the heroic knight Kuros as he once again tries to bring down the evil Malkil. This time Malkil's taken the form of wind, water, fire and earth, so you have to travel to each element's domain, collect the pieces of the Ironsword, then head to IceFire Mountain and defeat him. Ironsword has more depth than the original, adding a money system to the game as well as magic: you can now learn spells and use them to defeat certain bosses. ■

FACT

Bizarrely, on the game's box, Kuros is portrayed by famous Italian male model and romance novel cover star Fabio.

ISOLATED WARRIOR

Year	1991
Publisher	Vap / NTVIC
Developer	KID



THE PLANET PAN has been attacked by an alien force, which is able to consume all living things, machines and buildings. Pan's people (as in the residents, not the '70s UK dance troupe) are told to evacuate the planet but captain Max Maverick, living up to his name, decides that isn't going to happen. Time to get shooting. Isolated Warrior is a shoot 'em up that, unlike the usual vertical or horizontally scrolling nature of its peers, instead goes for an isometric viewpoint. Most of the game also takes place on foot, meaning that as well as the countless enemies there are also various pits to be jumped over. Things are made more interesting with the addition of a small hovercraft device and a motorbike. ■

FACT

If you can somehow manage to make it through all six stages without dying, you'll play a much harder seventh stage to get the true ending. If you're lazy, enter the password 3279 to jump straight to level 7.

IVAN 'IRONMAN' STEWART'S SUPER OFF ROAD

Year	1990
Publisher	Tradewest
Developer	Rare

THIS SINGLE-SCREEN ARCADE racer, originally developed by the California-based Leland Corporation and ported to the NES by Rare, featured the likeness of Ivan Stewart, a legendary off-road racer who won the Baja 500 a record 17 times. Similar to games like Super Sprint, Super Off Road consists of a series of indoor off-road races that get progressively more difficult. There are eight tracks in total, featuring a variety of bumps and jumps that can wildly affect your car's handling. You can only move onto the next if you finish in first place (or lose and have an extra life left). There's also a nitro system that gives you a much-needed burst of speed. Winning races earns money that can be spent on car upgrades or more nitros. ■

FACT

The Ivan Stewart licence only lasted a couple of years, so by the time the game was ported to some systems (like the SNES and Mega Drive) it had simply been renamed Super Off Road and his grinning face had been removed.

JACK NICKLAUS' GREATEST 18 HOLES OF MAJOR CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF

Year 1990
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

THE GAME WITH the longest title in the NES library (and easily the most frustrating one for the poor person who's laying out this book), JNG18HMCG is a golf game consisting of a single 18-hole course. This isn't any old course, mind you: it actually consists of the 18 real-life holes that Jack Nicklaus considers his favourites in America, Scotland and England. One minute you're on hole 8 at Pebble Beach, the next it's hole 14 at St. Andrews. This novel approach doesn't quite make up for the game's other drawbacks, however: the power meter is a little awkward and the course has to draw itself after every stroke, essentially resulting in that rarest of beasts, loading in an NES game. ■

FACT

Jack Nicklaus is considered by many to be the greatest golfer of all time. With 18 major championships and a career spanning 44 years, it's hard to argue.

JACKAL

Year 1988
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

THE VIETNAM WAR has ended, but US satellites have discovered that there are still dozens of prisoners of war being held on enemy soil. The President contacts the Green Berets and asks them to send the 'Jackals' – elite jeep-driving commandos – to Vietnam to rescue the POWs. Jackal is a run-and-gun game for one or two players, in which each player controls a jeep. There are six enemy territories to drive though, firing your machine gun, bazooka and hand grenades along the way. The aim is to destroy barracks to find POWs: when you do you have to pick them up in your jeep and drive them to the heliport, where a chopper will be waiting to take them home. ■

FACT

Jackal was known as Top Gunners in American arcades, but when Konami ported it to the NES it decided to change to the game's Japanese name to avoid confusion with its other NES game Top Gun.

JACKIE CHAN'S ACTION KUNG FU

Year 1990
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Now Production

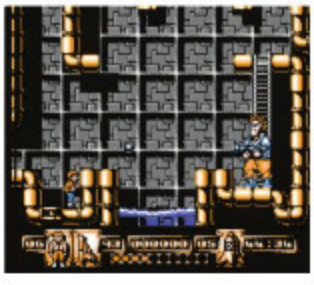
JACKIE CHAN NEEDS no introduction to fans of martial arts movies, so an action game starring the Hong Kong legend was a no-brainer. Action Kung Fu is a side-scroller – one with satisfyingly chunky and detailed sprites – in which Jackie has to find and defeat an evil sorcerer, killing his monsters along the way, in order to save China and rescue his twin sister Josephine. As you fight through the game's five stages you'll find power-ups that let you perform a finite number of special moves, ranging from spin kicks to 'sky attacks' (vertical jump kicks). A 'secret' code can be entered to give you 99 continues, but it isn't much of a secret because it's in the manual. ■

FACT

Jackie Chan doesn't actually have a twin sister. This is more awkward in hindsight, because in 2003 he appeared in the documentary Traces of a Dragon where he discovered his family's secret past, including two half-sisters he didn't know about.

JAMES BOND JR

Year 1992
Publisher THQ
Developer Eurocom



THIS CURIOUS ANIMATED series debuted in 1991 and told the story of James Bond's nephew and his adventures with his friend IQ (the grandson of Bond's gadget man Q) and love interest Tracy. In the game, the evil SCUM organisation led by the Scumlord has kidnapped the world's scientists, so the teenage spy heads out on a rescue mission armed with gadgets a-plenty. As well as his standard handgun, James can make use of his scuba gear and special bubble gun to travel and fire underwater, along with a jetpack that lets him fly and shoot fireballs. Oddly, you can also find a potion which can turn James into a werewolf, something his uncle presumably wouldn't have approved of. ■

FACT

In case you're wondering if James Bond Jr had a catchphrase like his more famous uncle, he most certainly did, though it was a bit rubbish: 'The name's Bond, James Bond. Junior.'

JAWS

Year 1987
Publisher LJN
Developer Atlus / Westone

EVERYONE REMEMBERS THE bit in Steven Spielberg's blockbuster *Jaws* where the deep sea diver dives into the water and starts harpooning the hell out of stingrays and jellyfish. If not, you'd better, because that's what takes up the majority of your time while playing the NES version. The aim is to kill these smaller creatures and collect the shells they leave behind, then trade these shells in at nearby docks to power up your ship. Once it's strong enough, it's time to take on Jaws: first by jumping into the sea and taking him on face-to-face (there's a mini submarine available to use if you can find it), and then heading back to your ship to ram him for the final blow. ■

FACT

Despite the name, Jaws is actually based on the fourth movie, *Jaws: The Revenge*. The cover art is based on that movie's poster, and Jaws is also defeated in that movie by being rammed by a boat.

JEOPARDY!

Year 1988
Publisher GameTek
Developer Rare

THE FIRST OF three Rare-developed NES games based on the long-running American quiz show. Host Alex Trebek is nowhere to be found here, but the classic *Jeopardy!* music is present and accounted for as up to three players take part in the Jeopardy, Double Jeopardy and Final Jeopardy rounds as in the show. There are exactly 1,500 questions in the game, with categories ranging from straightforward (Hollywood, The Fifties, Scotland) to a little less conventional (Dogs on TV, Names From Old Maps and the worryingly titled Long Lovely Ladies). Although it doesn't support multitaps, it still lets you play with up to three players by making players one and three share a controller. Player one buzzes in with the D-Pad, player three with the A button. ■

FACT

Here's a sample question from the game: 'This American sitcom was adapted from the British TV series Steptoe and Son.' The answer: 'What is Sanford and Son?'

JEOPARDY! JUNIOR EDITION

Year 1989
Publisher GameTek
Developer Rare

JEOPARDY! SOLD WELL on the NES, but the questions were a little too taxing for younger gamers who may not have known much about politics or, indeed, 'long lovely ladies'. The following year Rare and GameTek released Junior Edition, a version of the game aimed at children aged 7 and up. The core game itself is more or less identical to the standard version of Jepoardy! except the contestant sprites have been changed to look like children (because having adults answer these painfully easy questions would look strange). There are 1,740 questions this time, with categories ranging from Marvel Super-Heroes and Foreign Words to Cartoon Animals and Muppet Madness. So, if you know the name of Kermit the Frog's nephew you're in luck. It's Robin. ■

FACT

Here's a sample question from the Junior Edition: 'Everyone went ape when he climbed up the Empire State Building.' The answer: 'Who is King Kong?'

JEOPARDY! 25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Year 1990
Publisher GameTek
Developer Rare

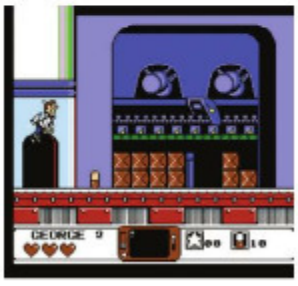
JUST IN CASE you hadn't had your fill of Jeopardy! quiz action on your NES, Rare and GameTek went to the well once again to deliver a third helping of trivia. Returning to more adult-focused questions, the 25th Anniversary Edition features 1,740 brand new questions, with categories like Chewing Gum, The Beatles and Literary Lions and Tigers. Once again it's essentially the same core game as before, although the avatars look suspiciously like the ones from the Junior Edition with beards added. This was the last Jeopardy! game Rare worked on, but if you're the methodical type who's been obediently reading this book in alphabetical order you'll later find that a fourth title, Super Jeopardy!, was released without Rare's involvement. ■

FACT

A sample question from the 25th Anniversary Edition: 'This company's first electronic pocket calculator is in the Smithsonian.' The answer: 'What is Texas Instruments?'

THE JETSONS: COGSWELL'S CAPER!

Year 1992
Publisher Taito
Developer Natsume



IT'S ANNOYING WHEN you're trying to have a nap at work and the boss comes in with work for you to do. It's even more annoying when you're George Jetson, and the work in question is saving the people of Planet M38 from the nasty Mr Cogswell by ending production of the mining work his company is doing there. Bit of a task for a regular employee. This platformer features eight stages and has George trying to find his family members, each of whom has a special item that will help him defeat Cogswell. For example, his son Elroy has a pair of magnetic boots for George, while his daughter Judy has a jet board that can transfer you across large gaps. ■

FACT

A bizarre Jetsons & WWE crossover movie was released in 2017, in which professional wrestler The Big Show is frozen in a blizzard and is thawed out by George in the future to discover the WWE is now a robot wrestling promotion.

JIMMY CONNORS TENNIS

Year 1993
Publisher Ubisoft
Developer NMS Software

UBISOFT'S ATTEMPT AT a tennis game on the NES was a realistic (for the time) interpretation of the sport, backed by US tennis great Jimmy Connors. Connors' only presence in the game is as the default name for the character you control, though you can change it. Although there's a practice mode where you can face off against a tennis ball machine and hit 100, 200 or 300 balls back at it, the meat of the game is in its 'Play' mode, where you go on a world tour playing the final matches of 16 different real-life tournaments (from the Australian Open and US Open to the Wimbledon All England Championship). Each court has a different surface which affects the ball's bouncing speed and height. ■

FACT

For 30 years, Jimmy Connors held the record for the longest run as the world's number one ranked tennis player (160 weeks). This was eventually overtaken by Roger Federer, who managed 237 weeks.

JOE & MAC

Year 1992
Publisher Data East / Elite Systems
Developer Elite Systems

KNOWN BY THE full title of Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja in Europe, Data East's Joe & Mac was released on a number of 8-bit and 16-bit systems, with development duties for the NES version delegated to UK studio Elite Systems. It's an action platformer following the adventures of a caveman called Joe as he heads out – armed with the likes of axes, boomerangs, fire and even stone wheels – in search of the 'bogus bunch of Neanderthal nerds' who've eaten all of his village's supplies and kidnapped its cavewomen. The arcade and SNES versions featured two-player co-op, but the NES game couldn't handle it and so, despite its name, Mac doesn't feature in the NES game: he's 'out hunting for dinosaurs' while all this is going on. ■

FACT

Despite having a stone wheel as a weapon, Joe & Mac's manual is quick to point out that the wheel 'was not actually invented until 5,500 years ago' and 'was made of wood'. Way to kill the lore, guys.

JOHN ELWAY'S QUARTERBACK

Year 1989
Publisher Tradewest
Developer Leland Corporation

DON'T WORRY, JOHN Elway hasn't bought his own personal quarterback that he sends out on errands for him. This is a home port of Tradewest's arcade game, simply titled, Quarterback, which then had Denver Broncos legend John Elway's endorsement added to it. It's fair to say it isn't the finest recreation of the sport ever committed to cartridge: due to hardware limitations there are only nine players on each team, and for some odd reason the CPU really struggles to defend against a specific play (Sneak). It isn't without positives, though: the throwing mechanic – hold the B button, move an on-screen cursor with the D-Pad, then let go of B – does a good job of recreating the stress of passing under pressure. ■

FACT

John Elway played for the Denver Broncos his entire career, winning the Super Bowl with them twice. When he retired he eventually became the General Manager of the Broncos, helping them win the Super Bowl again.

JORDAN VS BIRD: ONE ON ONE

Year 1989
Publisher Milton Bradley
Developer Rare

MICHAEL JORDAN AND Larry Bird were easily two of the most famous basketball players throughout the late '80s and early '90s, but their play styles were very different. Bird was known for his ability to shoot three-pointers with incredible accuracy, while Jordan was a master dunker who could fly through the air like… well, a bird. Jordan vs Bird puts both superstars against each other in one-on-one contest to see which playing style wins out. Naturally you can play as either Jordan or Bird, in matches that are either timed or played until a certain score is reached. As well as the one-on-one matches each player also has their own mini-game based on their talent: a slam dunk contest starring Jordan, and a three-point contest featuring Bird. ■

FACT

Jordan vs Bird is actually a sequel to the 1983 Apple II game One on One: Dr J vs Larry Bird, in which Bird went up against Philadelphia 76ers legend Julius Erving.

JOURNEY TO SILIUS

Year 1990
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft

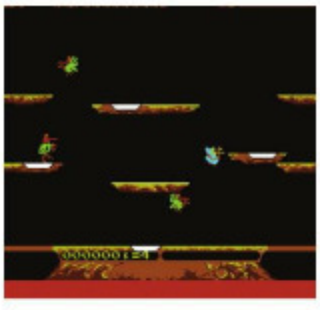
WHILE SUNSOFT WAS working on its Batman game, it also had a Terminator title in the works. It was so close to completion that Sunsoft had already sent fliers to retailers telling them it was coming, but then the Terminator licence expired. Sunsoft was forced to quickly redesign and the result was Journey to Silius, a futuristic action platformer where the player instead controls Jay McCray, the son of a scientist, as he sets out to defeat the terrorists who killed his dad and plan on destroying his colony. The lack of recognisable branding means Journey to Silius is remembered far less today than it deserves to be: it's fun and full of action, right up to the final boss battle against a suspiciously familiar looking metallic android. ■

FACT

NES games are regularly set in silly times (the year 20XX being a popular choice) but Journey to Silius has a good one too: it's set in the year 0373 in 'the new space age calendar'.

JOUST

Year 1988
Publisher HAL Laboratory
Developer HAL Laboratory



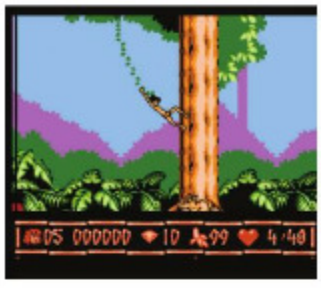
AS A YOUNG programmer working for HAL, Satoru Iwata heard in the early '80s that Nintendo and Atari were planning to release the NES in the west together. This deal would include an agreement for Nintendo to release ports of four Atari games. Offering his services as a freelancer, Iwata programmed an NES version of Joust (a Williams game, but Atari owned the rights to it). The Nintendo/Atari deal fell apart and Joust lay unreleased for half a decade, until HAL released the game itself. This, then, was the first game Iwata coded for the NES, and it's a brilliant adaptation of the popular ostrich-ramming arcade classic. Players must make their space ostrich flap its wings in order to gain speed and in turn knock enemies off their steeds. ■

FACT

If Joust's gameplay sounds familiar, it should. Iwata would go on to program Balloon Fight, an NES game that shares many similarities including the inertia-based flapping system.

THE JUNGLE BOOK

Year 1994
Publisher Virgin Interactive
Developer Eurocom



THE HUGE SUCCESS of Virgin Interactive's game based on Disney's *Aladdin* (primarily the Mega Drive version) meant players wanted something similar. With Disney's next movie *The Lion King* still a while away, Virgin filled the time by releasing a platformer based on *The Jungle Book*, which had been re-released on home video in the early '90s and so was still fresh in childrens' memories. The NES version is a 10-level platformer where Mowgli heads towards the 'man village' accompanied by his pal Bagheera. As well as the jumping and vine-swinging you'd expect, Mowgli can also collect bananas which he can then chuck at enemies (similar to the apples in the Aladdin game). Naturally, there's a final boss battle against the evil tiger Shere Khan. ■

FACT

The Jungle Book was the first film the company released after the death of Walt Disney, and was a massive success worldwide. It's still Germany's highest-grossing film of all time.

JURASSIC PARK

Year 1993
Publisher Ocean
Developer Ocean

STEVEN SPIELBERG'S DINOSAUR epic was one of the biggest events in motion picture history, and this was reflected in the video game adaptations. No fewer than seven completely different Jurassic Park games were released for various systems, with the NES and Game Boy getting a top-down adventure game by Ocean Software. Playing as Alan Grant, you have to explore Isla Nublar and locate missing children Tim and Lex, before finding a way to get off the island. Although it has Zelda-style free-roaming elements it's split into six separate levels, each with a separate mission: avoiding a triceratops stampede, escaping a T-Rex while on a boat (a scene from the novel), restoring power to the island's computers and the like. ■

FACT

If you're wondering where Laura Dern, Jeff Goldblum or Richard Attenborough's characters are in the NES game, it seems they didn't make it. The manual says Alan, Tim and Lex are the 'only three human survivors'.

KABUKI: QUANTUM FIGHTER

Year 1991
Publisher HAL Laboratory
Developer Human Entertainment

HERE'S A HELL of a story for you. In the year 2056, the main central computer controlling the Earth has been infected with a virus. A brave military colonel named Scott O'Connor agrees to take part in a highly experimental mission: his body is transformed into code and he enters the computer in an attempt to kill the virus from the inside. Oh, and he's dressed like a traditional Japanese Kabuki dancer, because his great-grandfather was one. Taking place over six levels, Kabuki: Quantum Fighter is an action platformer with a couple of interesting weapons: as well as standard things like a gun and dynamite, you can also collect memory chips to throw at enemies or, if all else fails, use your trusty hair like a surprisingly powerful whip. ■

FACT

Kabuki is a classical style of Japanese dance drama. It first began in Japan in 1603 and continues to this day, though it was banned by occupation forces after the Second World War because it promoted Japan's role in the war.

KARATE CHAMP

Year 1986
Publisher Data East
Developer Data East

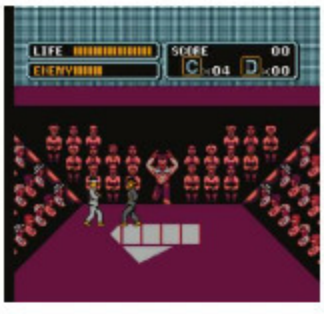
IF YOU'VE EVER wanted to become a karate master, then this might be the game for you. Than again, it probably isn't. Karate Champ is a one-on-one fighting game set over 'nine picturesque settings', according to the manual. While some of these settings are indeed lovely (a canyon, the desert, the jungle at night) just as many of them are grim (an alleyway, a shady pier, a grey warehouse). Combat is similar to games like Best of the Best, as the player can pull off a wide variety of moves depending on which direction they're holding and whether they're pressing A, B or both buttons. Sadly, it was criticised for atrocious hit detection: often you'd put a foot right through your opponent's face and it wouldn't register. ■

FACT

Data East sued Epyx for its game International Karate (known in America as World Karate Championship), claiming copyright infringement. The court disagreed, saying it was fine for both games to exist.

THE KARATE KID

Year 1987
Publisher LJN
Developer Atlus



BASED ON THE first two *Karate Kid* films, the NES Karate Kid game actually starts with the martial arts tournament from the end of the first movie. Once you get past that there are three stages set in Okinawa, where the second movie takes place. The aim is to find and defeat the nasty Chozen three times in order to become a martial arts master. Along the way you'll come across three different mini-games in which Daniel has to dodge a swinging hammer, catch flies with chopsticks and break blocks of ice. Beat these mini-games and you'll earn power-ups that let you pull off a drum punch and Daniel's iconic crane kick from the end of the first film. Sadly, there's no 'wax on, wax off' scene. ■

FACT

Ralph Macchio, who played Daniel in the Karate Kid movies, was on *Dancing with the Stars* in the US. He finished in fourth place that year, with the winner being NFL player Hines Ward.

KARNOV

Year	1988
Publisher	Data East
Developer	Data East

MEET JINBOROV KARNOVSKI, better known as Karnov. He's a Russian strongman who can breathe fire, and he's from the village of Creamina, where the valuable Lost Treasure of Babylon is usually kept. A huge dragon called Ryu steals the treasure after thousands of years of trying, so the villagers ask Karnov to go and get it back for them.

Although it's a platform game, Karnov lets the player collect ten different 'options' – a feature that's more often associated with shoot 'em ups – and store them at the bottom of the screen. These range from standard weapons like a boomerang and bombs, to more unique items like glasses (which let you see hidden power-ups) and a swimming mask (which lets you swim faster underwater). ■

FACT

Karnov has appeared in a number of other Data East games. Most notably, he's the end-of-level boss in the first level of Bad Dudes vs DragonNinja.

KICKMASTER

Year	1992
Publisher	Taito
Developer	KID

THE KINGDOM OF Lowrel used to be a peaceful place, but the evil wizard Belzed put a stop to that by sending his monsters to set it ablaze, killing the King and Queen and kidnapping Princess Silphee in the process. The great knight Macren fails to save the day and in his dying breath asks his brother Tonolan to use his 'great kicking skills' to rescue the princess.

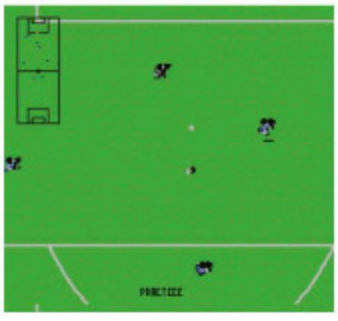
KickMaster is an action platformer set over the course of eight stages where the player is tasked with helping Tonolan kick his way through anything that moves. Along the way you'll gain experience points and level up, expanding your repertoire of kicks in the process: you start with three, and as your level increases this rises to ten. It's a lot of kicking, basically. ■

FACT

KickMaster is a tricky enough game in its own right, but if you can manage to finish it you're 'rewarded' with the option to play a harder version of the game. Good luck with that.

KICK OFF

Year	1992
Publisher	Imagineer
Developer	Enigma Variations



BRITISH DEVELOPER DINO Dini created the massively popular Kick Off for the Amiga and Atari ST in the late '80s. Its success led to a number of ports on other systems, including the NES. It's a football game with a top-down viewpoint and was much loved for its extremely fast pace and its learning curve. Whereas most other football games before it had the ball more or less 'glued' to each player's feet, in Kick Off your players would kick the ball ahead of them as they ran. This meant a great deal more skill was needed for something as simple as changing direction, but with practice players would eventually get the hang of it, making it an incredibly satisfying game to master. ■

FACT

Long before artificial grass became a common thing in professional football, Kick Off was already one step ahead. One of the game's options is a choice of normal, wet, soggy or 'plastic' pitch.

KICKLE CUBICLE

Year	1990
Publisher	Irem
Developer	Irem

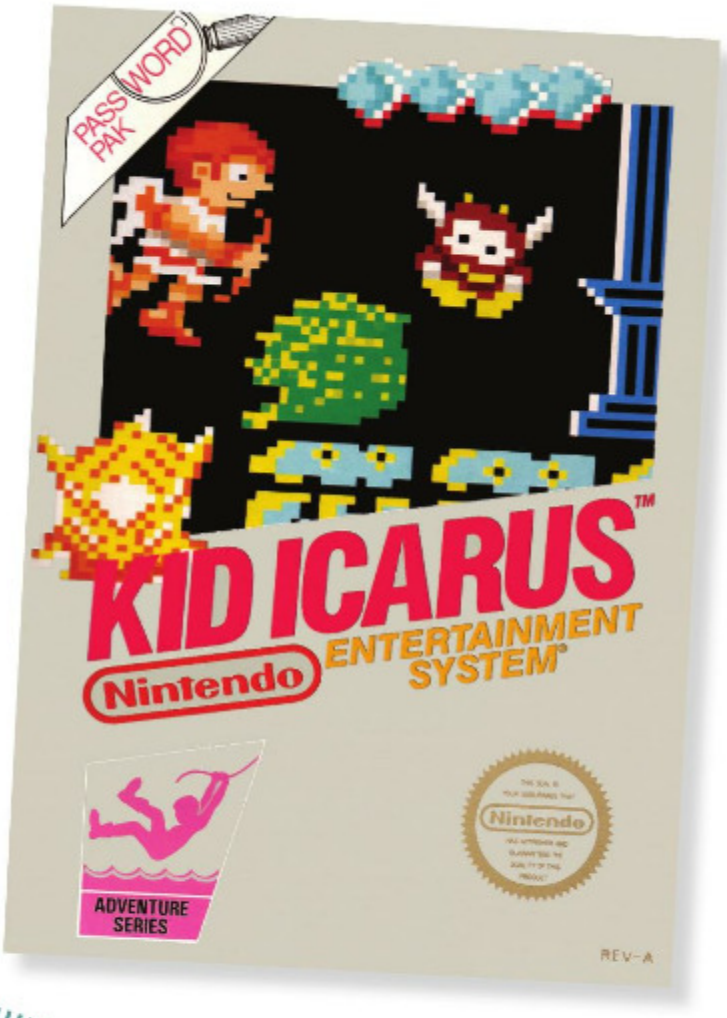
KICKLE IS A small lad who wears earmuffs and has the unique ability to use his freezing breath to turn enemies into blocks of ice. One day the Wicked Wizard King turned the four lands of the Fantasy Kingdom into an ice world, and trapped its residents in Dream Bags. Kickle has to collect all the bags and rescue his kingdom. This is a puzzle game where the central mechanic is turning enemies into blocks, then kicking them across the floor. Kicking them into various objects affects their properties: for example, by kicking them into water you can create bridges, and by kicking them into springs you can change the direction they slide in. After beating the 71 main stages you unlock the 'Special Game' mode, which features 30 even harder puzzles. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of Kickle Cubicle has some slight differences. As well as including more enemies in each level, it also lets players choose the order they take on the game's four worlds.

KID ICARUS

Year	1987
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D1



THE DREAM TEAM of director Satoru Okada, producer Gunpei Yokoi, designer Yoshio Sakamoto and composer Hip Tanaka is usually associated with Metroid, but the group also worked on another classic NES game at roughly the same time. Kid Icarus (known as Light Mythology: Palutena's Mirror when it originally launched on the Famicom Disk System in Japan) is an action platformer in which the hero is a little unassuming angel.

It's set in Angel Land, an ancient place where gods and humans live together in harmony. It used to be ruled by two goddesses, Palutena (who ruled the light) and Medusa (who ruled the darkness). Because she took pleasure in destroying the humans' crops and turning people into stone, Medusa was banished to the Underworld by Palutena, where she vowed to get revenge.

And get it she did: Medusa gathered an Underworld army of monsters and evil spirits and used them to take over the Palace in the Sky, locking Palutena away and stealing the three Sacred Treasures: the Mirror Shield, Arrow of Light and Wings of Pegasus. As the game opens, Palutena – with the last of her strength – has used her magic powers to contact Pit, a young angel held in the Underworld's dungeon. Granting Pit a bow and arrow, Palutena gives him his mission: escape from the dungeon and make his way up through the Underworld until he reaches the Palace in the Sky, collecting the Sacred Treasures along the way, and destroy Medusa.

There are four main types of stage in Kid Icarus. The one that appears most often is the vertically-scrolling level, where Pit has to make his way upwards, jumping from platform to platform until he reaches an exit at the top. These stages are particularly difficult because the bottom of the screen counts as a pit (no pun intended), meaning you can't fall back down or you'll die immediately. Then there are side-scrolling levels, which are a little more conventional, and a horizontal shoot 'em up section near the end of the game. Finally, at the end of each world is a labyrinth stage made up of individual linked rooms: here you have to figure out how to reach the boss and defeat it.

FACT

One of the enemies in the game is a massive floating pair of lips called Mick. It looks suspiciously similar to the famous 'tongue and lips' logo for The Rolling Stones, whose lead singer is Mick Jagger.

Kid Icarus is a difficult game. It's split into four worlds – the Underworld, the Overworld, the Skyworld and the Palace in the Sky – but most players never made it past the Underworld and its four stages without a great deal of practice and patience. And yet the game was never criticised for this: it never felt cheap, and player death was a fault of the player: a badly-aimed arrow here, a misplaced jump there (and there and there). Its charm always won through (partly thanks to Tanaka's incredible music), and its cult following resulted in Pit's return on the 3DS in 2012, a whole 21 years after the second Kid Icarus game on Game Boy. Pit may forever be in Samus' shadow, but there are many players who continue to have a special place in their hearts for the little angel who restored the light. ■

KID KLOWN IN NIGHT MAYOR WORLD

Year	1993
Publisher	Kemco
Developer	Kemco

KEMCO'S CRAZY CASTLE series often included licensed games in Japan that had either different licenses or none at all in the west. This has already been addressed in this book with The Bugs Bunny Crazy Castle (aka Roger Rabbit), and Kid Klown is another example. Known as Mickey Mouse III in Japan, Kid Klown ditches Disney's loveable rodent for a young clown lad. The evil magician Night Mayor ('Nightmare', geddit) has kidnapped the rest of the Klown family, so Kid has to get them back so they can perform at the next circus show. It's a straightforward platform game where the main weapon is balloons: these can be used to attack enemies (because apparently they're painful balloons), and let you float to get over larger gaps. ■

FACT

Despite seemingly being a generic character dreamed up purely to replace Mickey Mouse, Kid Klown starred in another few games on the SNES and PlayStation.

KID KOOL AND THE QUEST FOR THE SEVEN WONDER HERBS

Year	1990
Publisher	Vic Tokai
Developer	Vic Tokai

KING VOLDAM THE Fifth is ill. He needs seven special herbs, but they're all located in the evil Draxer Empire. Luckily, a 'radical' young 'dude' called Kid Kool has arrived in the Kingdom of Voldam, and since he's such a confident lad he's tasked with retrieving the herbs. Kid Kool is a platformer where momentum is important: he takes a while to build up speed, but once he does you can skim him across water and grab bendy poles to reach higher areas. The game also has a time-based system: the ending changes depending on how quickly you return the herbs. Vic Tokai released three more games with the Kid Kool engine on Sega systems: Psycho Fox, Magical Flying Turbo Hat Adventure and Decap Attack. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of Kid Kool was based on Kakefu-kun, a child star in Japan in the '80s. Presumably his wacky sensibilities weren't suitable for the west, which is why he was kool-ified.

KID NIKI: RADICAL NINJA

Year	1987
Publisher	Data East
Developer	Tose

ALLOW ME TO quote from the manual: 'Kid Niki is truly awesome! This "rad" and "bad" punk dude is out to rescue his spike-haired girlfriend, Princess Margo, from the clutches of the Stone Wizard.' As you may be able to tell, Kid Niki was an attempt to appeal to '80s children in much the same way as a 35-year-old actor pretends to be a teenager in a high school movie. After starting off with the odd cry of 'WILL HELP YOU', Niki runs, jumps and slashes his way through seven stages, facing a boss at the end of each. He's armed with a spinning sword, which is swung like a normal sword and doesn't do anything different except for the fact it spins. ■

FACT

Kid Niki makes a cameo appearance at the start of Kickle Cubicle if you hold down the A button on the second controller as you turn on your NES. He'll replace an enemy on the title screen.

KING'S KNIGHT

Year	1989
Publisher	Square
Developer	Square / Workss

A SQUARE GAME about a princess being kidnapped by a dragon and four heroes heading out to save her? Sounds like an RPG… except King's Knight is actually a vertically-scrolling shoot 'em up instead. Much like Capcom's Gun.Smoke, the player controls a character walking slowly up the screen and shooting at enemies, instead of a ship. Each of the game's first four stages is controlled by a different hero – there's Ray Jack the Knight, Kaliva the Wizard, Barusa the Monster and Toby the Thief – and when you reach the final fifth stage all four heroes join forces, team up in a tight formation and take on the final boss together (which is nice, but makes your sprite massive). ■

FACT

A remake of King's Knight called King's Knight: Wrath of the Dark Dragon was released on mobile in September 2017. In Final Fantasy XV, it's revealed that lead character Noctis loves playing it.

KINGS OF THE BEACH

Year 1990
Publisher Ultra Games
Developer Konami

BELIEVE IT OR not, the 'kings of the beach' aren't the lifeguards or the guys who are there early in the morning with metal detectors. They're actually beach volleyball players, as this Konami game indicates. Its tournament mode lets you play as volleyball legends Sinjin Smith and Randy Stoklos on five different beaches – San Diego, Chicago, Hawaii, Rio de Janeiro and Australia – as you face off against a selection of opponents. These range from real life players (Mike Dodd, Tim Hovland) to characters from other games (like Lester from Skate or Die). If you aren't happy with the ref's decision you can argue with him: convince him and he'll overturn it, but keep annoying him and he'll penalise you. ■

FACT

Believe it or not, Kings of the Beach is actually based on a book of the same name written by Sinjin Smith, which tells the story of beach volleyball.

KING'S QUEST V

Year 1992
Publisher Konami
Developer Novotrade

KING'S QUEST WAS a massively popular graphic adventure series created by Roberta Williams, the legendary co-founder of Sierra On-Line. While the original series spawned eight games, only twice did it come to consoles: a Master System port of the first game, and this NES version of the fifth. King's Quest V tells the story of King Graham, who returns from his countryside walk to find that his castle has disappeared (stolen by an evil wizard), and his family along with it. Accompanied by an owl called Cedric, Graham has to travel through the land of Serenia in search of the castle and his missing family. The NES version had many changes made to suit Nintendo of America's family-friendly remit, including the removal of some death scenes and references to death. ■

FACT

The game's subtitle, which appears on the box for other versions but is only shown on the title screen of the NES port, is 'Absence Makes the Heart Go Yonder'.

KIRBY'S ADVENTURE

Year 1993
Publisher Nintendo
Developer HAL Laboratory

KIRBY'S LIFE STARTED in the handheld world, when he made his debut in Kirby's Dream Land on the Game Boy in 1992. A year later he made his first and only NES appearance in Kirby's Adventure. After waking from a nap and realising he hasn't had any dreams – something that shouldn't happen in Dream Land – Kirby goes off to investigate. He discovers that his arch-enemy King Dedede has broken the Star Rod, the power source of the Fountain of Dreams, and given a piece to each of his friends (the game's bosses). Kirby has to recover all seven pieces, including the one Dedede has, so that Dream Land can sleep peacefully again.

Although this isn't Kirby's first game, Kirby's Adventure is still notable for introducing two extremely important aspects of this much-loved character. The first is his ability to swallow enemies and steal their abilities: while he could suck up enemies in the Game Boy game, he couldn't do anything with them other than simply spit them out as projectiles. This time Kirby can take on the appearance of some enemies after eating them, and gain their powers.

FACT

Kirby was originally supposed to be a placeholder sprite while creator Masahiro Sakurai tried to design a better character. He ended up preferring Kirby (or Popopo as he was known) and so he ended up staying.

The other important element introduced in Kirby's Adventure is Kirby's pink colour. Because the Game Boy version was monochrome Kirby didn't have a colour, and as a result he was white on the box art. When the NES game came around it was decided that Kirby should be pink, and so an iconic character was born. Well, re-born. ■

KLASH BALL

Year	1991
Publisher	Sofel
Developer	Sofel

KLASH BALL IS better known as the name it goes by on all other formats, Speedball. It's a futuristic sports game which borrows elements from handball, ice hockey and pinball. Players run around with a metallic ball, trying to throw it into their opponent's goal. There are no rules when it comes to physicality, so you can plough into other players as recklessly as you like. Keeping things interesting are a series of large round obstacles that the ball can be bounced off, and two holes in the middle of the court which serve as a teleports: throw the ball into one hole and it comes out of the other. Klash Ball was an entertaining game but its sequel, Speedball 2, was the real success. ■

FACT

The other versions of Speedball were developed by The Bitmap Brothers, a much-loved British developer responsible for games like Xenon, Cadaver and The Chaos Engine (also known as Soldiers of Fortune).

KNIGHT RIDER

Year	1989
Publisher	Acclaim
Developer	Pack-In Video

VERY FEW THINGS scream 'this is the eighties' like the *Knight Rider* TV show did. Starring David Hasselhoff as a crime fighter who drives a near-indestructible, seemingly sentient talking car called KITT, *Knight Rider* was a big hit. This NES adaptation has you driving through 15 cities as you chase a group of terrorists, all while making sure you don't run out of fuel. The game takes a few liberties when it comes to details: for example, KITT is now armed with a big machine gun which is used to gun down enemies (you can spot them because they're driving red cars). Perhaps the biggest outrage, however, is that the iconic *Knight Rider* theme music is nowhere to be heard. ■

FACT

Activision's deal with Pack-In Video was that Pack-In would have the rights to sell Knight Rider in Japan and Activision could sell it everywhere else. The problem was, Activision didn't own the rights to Knight Rider: it had to get them after the deal was done.

KONAMI HYPER SOCCER

Year	1992
Publisher	Konami
Developer	Konami

SOME OF THE greatest accomplishments start from humble beginnings, and Konami Hyper Soccer is a shining example of this. Released only in Europe and Australia, it's a fairly unassuming football game with 24 teams to choose from and the option to play either a friendly (exhibition) match or a World Cup style tournament. The controls are basic but the sprites are nice and large, and it's generally a half-decent football game if nothing remarkable.

The important thing is that, a couple of years later, Konami built on Hyper Soccer's foundations to make a SNES football game, International Superstar Soccer. While the initial NES effort may not have been revolutionary, then, the SNES game it spawned (and its subsequent N64 follow-up) most certainly was. ■

FACT

Konami repeated this 'prototype' process again in the mid '90s. Its PlayStation game Goal Storm was the predecessor to International Superstar Soccer Pro, which eventually 'evolved' into the Pro Evolution Soccer series.

THE KRION CONQUEST

Year	1991
Publisher	Vic Tokai
Developer	Vic Tokai

YOU MIGHT NOT remember this, but in 1999 a robot battalion known as the Krion Empire came to Earth and brought it to the brink of destruction. After Earth refused to surrender, the Krions set up large bases all over the world, and started sending out robot troops to attack. Playing as a witch called Francesca, it's up to you to save the day by fighting through five stages and defeating the bosses in each. The Krion Conquest is clearly heavily influenced by the Mega Man series: not only does it move and play just like it (right down to the way the screen scrolls between sections), but Francesca can also switch weapons, which changes the colour of her outfit, just like in Capcom's games. ■

FACT

The Krion Conquest was originally supposed to be based on the anime series *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Although they ended up not getting the licence, the hero in the Japanese version is still called Doropie (Dorothy).

KRUSTY'S FUN HOUSE

Year 1992
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Audiogenic

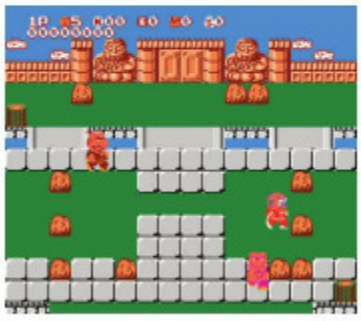
KRUSTY THE CLOWN has a problem. Or, more specifically, his theme park Krustyland does. Its fun house has been overrun by rats, so Krusty has to get rid of them by guiding them to a series of rat extermination devices operated by various Simpsons characters, including Bart, Homer and Sideshow Mel. You do this by placing blocks, connecting pipes, destroying floors and walls and activating various other mechanisms in a series of progressively more difficult and complex puzzle stages, while also killing the other enemies roaming the fun house (snakes, aliens, giant birds and flying pigs). It's essentially a reverse version of Lemmings, then, in that instead of trying to save the aimlessly wandering rodents you're trying to kill them. ■

FACT

Krusty's Fun House was actually originally an Amiga game called Rat Trap. The developer Audiogenic then licensed it to Acclaim who added the Simpsons branding. Pity the poor gamers who bought Rat Trap and then the Amiga version of Krusty's Fun House.

KUNG-FU HEROES

Year 1989
Publisher Culture Brain
Developer Culture Brain



JACKY AND LEE, a pair of kung fu masters (who definitely weren't named after Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee) return home after weeks of training to find that their village has been overrun by monsters, Princess Min-Min has been kidnapped and the ten treasures of the land have been stolen. Not the best welcome home they've ever had. The pair have to make their way through the eight enemy castles (each with four levels), punching countless enemies along the way. Kung-Fu Heroes has a top-down Zelda style viewpoint, but its focus is purely on combat, with the aim being to defeat enough enemies in each level to open the door at the top of the screen and proceed to the next stage. ■

FACT

Many an eyebrow has been raised at the fact that Kung-Fu Heroes' sound effects sound curiously similar to the coin-collecting and 1-Up sounds from Super Mario Bros.

KUNG FU

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Irem

ONE OF TWO NES launch games developed by Irem (the other being 10-Yard Fight), Kung Fu was initially a movie tie-in based on the Jackie Chan film *Wheels on Meals*, but by the time the game made it to the west the only remaining connection was the characters' names, Thomas and Sylvia. The former has to rescue the latter from the evil crime boss Mr X, who's holding her captive on the fifth floor of the Devil's Temple. Along the way, Thomas will encounter an endless stream of enemies, who tend to come in three main types: the standard 'Gripper' (who walks towards you and grabs you, draining your energy), the Knife Thrower (who keeps his distance and lobs blades at you) and the Tom Tom (a little person who has a tendency to leap up and attack you).

Thomas encounters a boss at the end of each of the five floors: though they aren't the most imaginatively named (Stick Fighter, Boomerang Fighter and Giant, anyone?), they at least ensure some variety in what can sometimes be a repetitive game. Ultimately, Kung Fu was a success: its easy-to-learn controls meant it was often the game retailers used to show off the NES near launch, and while many other early games in the NES library may not have aged so well and have become a little less entertaining over the years, the fact that Kung Fu is so simplistic and approachable means anyone can pick it up and enjoy it to this day. ■

FACT

Kung Fu's designer was Takashi Nishiyama, who knew his fighting: he designed the original Street Fighter game then moved to SNK to work on numerous Neo Geo fighting games, including Fatal Fury, Art of Fighting, Samurai Shodown and The King of Fighters '94.

LASER INVASION

Year	1991
Publisher	Konami
Developer	Konami

ORIGINALLY RELEASED AS Gun Sight in Japan, Laser Invasion was renamed for North America to tie in with Konami's Laser Scope peripheral. This was a large plastic headset that acted like a light gun: players lined its eyepiece up with a target then shouted 'fire' to shoot. Taking place over four missions, Laser Invasion has three different play styles. Each level begins with you flying a helicopter, taking out enemies with your NES controller and then landing in an enemy base. The action then switches to an on-rails light gun shooter (which can be played with the controller, the Laser Scope or a Zapper), before moving to a 3D maze section where you navigate with the controller then switch to your gun control every time you encounter an enemy. ■

FACT

The Laser Scope doubles as an extremely garish set of headphones. The author of this book once plugged them into his iPod and took a London tube journey wearing them for a bet.

LAST ACTION HERO

Year	1993
Publisher	Sony Imagesoft
Developer	Teeny Weeny Games

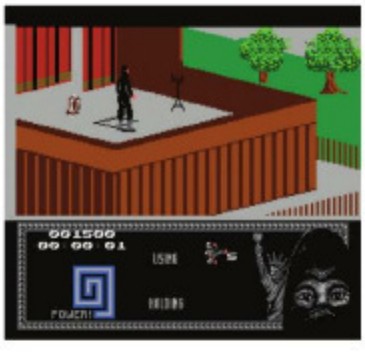
THE *LAST ACTION Hero* movie was a clever idea, even if it wasn't executed so well. The NES game follows the plot of the film, with evil screen villain Benedict finding his way into the real world and celluloid hero Jack Slater (Arnold Schwarzenegger) heading there too to stop him taking over. There are seven stages in this action platformer, ranging from the busiest and most violent Los Angeles street you'll ever see in a game – you can't move an inch without someone else popping up to shoot you – to stranger environments, like the set for Hamlet (based on the film's infamous Shakespeare scene). The movie was a box office dud, and though it wasn't terrible the game was far from a sell-out too. ■

FACT

Charles Dance, whose career enjoyed another boost when he starred as Tywin Lannister in *Game Of Thrones*, plays the main villain Benedict in *Last Action Hero*.

THE LAST NINJA

Year	1991
Publisher	Jaleco
Developer	Beam Software



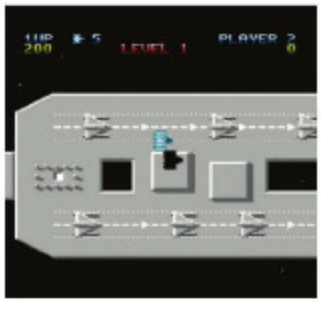
THIS IS ACTUALLY a port of The Last Ninja 2, as the first game was only released on home computers. The player controls Armakuni, a master ninja from the ninth century, who is teleported without warning to modern-day Manhattan. Although he has no idea where he is, Armakuni senses that his enemy – the evil shogun Kunitoki – is there too, so he heads off in search. The Last Ninja is played with an isometric viewpoint ('don't be confused by the unique 3D technology used', the manual reassures), as Armakuni works his way through Central Park, the New York streets, the sewers, an office block and a large mansion before facing off against Kunitoki. ■

FACT

There were three main Last Ninja games released on home computers. A fourth game was cancelled, as were attempts to reboot the series in the late '90s and again on PS2, Xbox and GameCube.

THE LAST STARFIGHTER

Year	1990
Publisher	Mindscape
Developer	Graftgold



WHAT IF YOUR video game skills could be used to save the world? That was the idea behind *The Last Starfighter*, a 1984 movie about a young lad who finds out that the space combat arcade game he's been obsessed with is actually a battle simulator placed on Earth by an alien defence force looking for the ultimate gunner to fight for them. The NES game kicks off with you in the Starfighter Corps, and has you taking out enemy Xurian fighters by flying back and forth across the game area, shooting them down. The Last Starfighter is a decent movie tie-in, but that's partly because it wasn't made for the movie: it's actually a reskinned version of Uridium, a Commodore 64 game far more popular in Europe. ■

FACT

The end credits of *The Last Starfighter* movie promise that a real-life arcade game was coming soon, courtesy of Atari. The game was never released, and neither were the Atari 2600 and 5200 versions also in development.

LEE TREVINO'S FIGHTING GOLF

Year 1988
Publisher SNK
Developer SNK

DON'T GET YOUR hopes up expecting a game about angry golfers swinging their clubs at each other here: one of the four words in the title of Lee Trevino's Fighting Golf isn't sufficiently represented in the game, and it isn't golf. As the name suggests, it's endorsed by pro golfer Lee Trevino, who with six major championships and 29 PGA Tour wins is arguably the best Hispanic golfer of all time. There are two courses to play through here: the USA, which is full of bunkers, and Japan, which mainly consists of water hazards. Players can choose between four golfers: Pretty Amy (high accuracy, low power), Big Jumbo (the opposite), Miracle Chosuke (low power, good putting) and Trevino himself, nicknamed Super Mex in the game (an all-rounder). ■

FACT

The Simpsons parodied this game in 1995. When Bart wants to rent the violent game Bonestorm but finds the shop is out of copies, he has to settle for the boring Lee Carvallo's Putting Challenge instead.

LEGACY OF THE WIZARD

Year 1989
Publisher Broderbund
Developer Falcom

THE IDEA OF slaying a dragon isn't exactly the most original one, but Legacy of the Wizard does something unique with it by offering an entire family of protagonists rather than a single hero. Many years ago, a wizard captured an evil dragon and buried it in the ground. The dragon will be back soon, but it can only be defeated by a magical sword called the DragonSlayer, and this is protected by four hidden crowns. The player controls the wizard's descendants – a young family consisting of a father, mother, son, daughter and pet monster – as they each head out one at a time to try and find the crowns. Each character has their own special abilities: for example, the mother can fly and the daughter can jump. ■

FACT

Legacy of the Wizard is actually the fourth game in Falcom's Dargon Slayer series in Japan. Its original title was Dragon Slayer IV: Drasle Family, but since it was the only game in the series to make it to the west it was renamed.

THE LEGEND OF KAGE

Year 1987
Publisher Taito
Developer Tose

SET IN THE 1800s, towards the end of the Edo period in Japan, The Legend of Kage tells the story of a young ninja trying to rescue a beautiful princess named Kiri from a group of mystical villains. It's a side-scrolling action game taking place over five stages, in which the player is armed with a sword and an infinite supply of shuriken stars. Kage can jump extremely high and climb trees, meaning battles can end up looking more like something out of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. The final boss battle is interesting in that the boss can't be directly harmed: instead, you must attack a nearby butterfly which is the source of his power. Hit the butterfly five times and the boss becomes open for attack. ■

FACT

A sequel, The Legend Of Kage 2, was released a mere 21 years later on Nintendo DS. Princess Kiri has been kidnapped again, and this time players can control either Kage or a female ninja called Chihiro.

THE LEGEND OF PRINCE VALIANT

Year 1992
Publisher Ocean
Developer Ocean

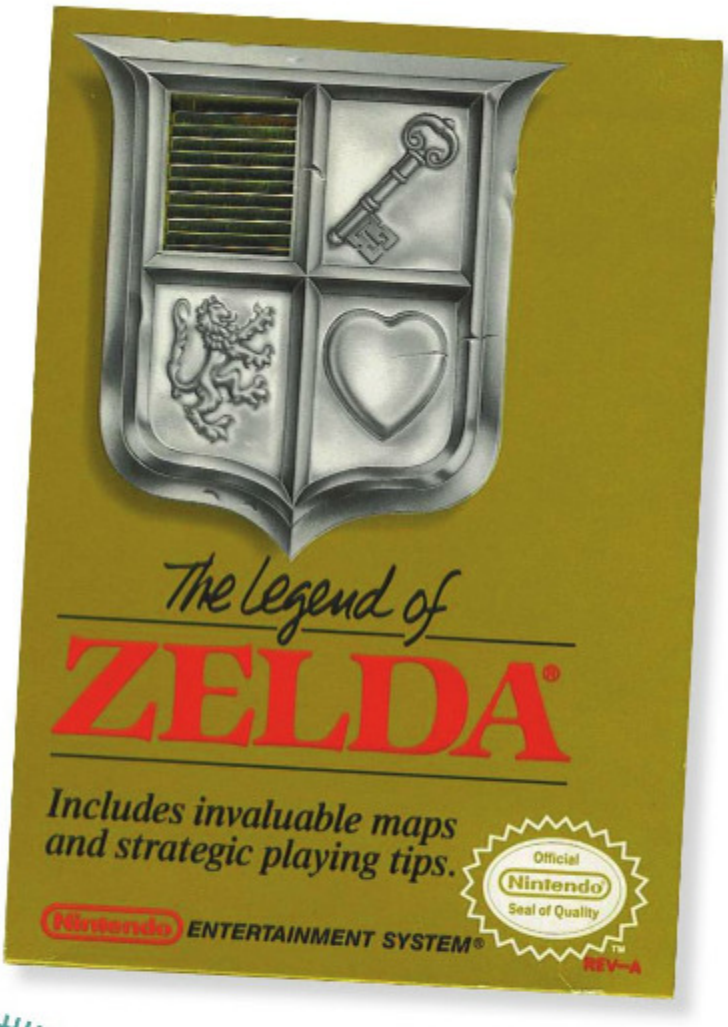
THE *PRINCE VALIANT* comic strip has been running since 1937, and ultimately spawned a 65-episode animated series in 1991. This game, which was only released in Europe, was based on that cartoon, and has Prince Valiant trying to make his way to Camelot – grabbing the legendary Viking Ring of Peace along the way – in order to convince King Arthur to make him a knight. The game has three distinct styles: the first level is a standard side-scrolling action platformer, levels 2 and 4 are first-person shooting sections using a crossbow and ship cannon respectively, and levels 3 and 5 are side-scrolling maze stages where you travel through various doors to try and find the exit. While a fun game, it has extreme swings in difficulty. ■

FACT

Your reward for fighting your way through an often difficult game (particularly the trap-heavy third stage) is an ending in which Arthur lets Prince Valiant enter a training programme to become a knight. So he doesn't even get to become one yet.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Year	1987
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D4



'AN EVERYDAY BOY gets drawn into a series of incredible events and grows to become a hero.' This, according to a 1994 interview with Shigeru Miyamoto, was the main theme behind The Legend of Zelda, the NES game that would begin a revolutionary franchise that continues to enrapture and immerse players more than 30 years later.

The first game tells the story of Link, a 'young lad' who's been tasked with stopping the evil Ganon from taking over the land of Hyrule. Ganon has captured the Triforce of Power, one of two Triforces (in this game, at least); so to ensure he doesn't also take the Triforce of Wisdom, Princess Zelda breaks it into eight pieces and scatters the pieces across Hyrule. Naturally, Ganon isn't too happy with this, so he locks Zelda up. It's up to Link to gather the eight pieces, rebuild the Triforce of Wisdom, defeat Ganon in Death Mountain and rescue Princess Zelda.

Initially armed with absolutely nothing, Link starts off in a field with a large cave in front of him. Much like how the first stage in Super Mario Bros. is designed to force the player into learning the game mechanics without a tutorial, this cave is practically begging to be explored, and in doing so the player is given a sword, enforcing the idea that exploration leads to rewards.

The Legend of Zelda was originally designed as a 1986 launch title for the Famicom Disk System, a floppy disk add-on for the Famicom that offered more storage and the ability to write data (for storing game saves). The latter feature in particular allowed for larger games, because players would be able to save their progress instead of either having to start from scratch or write down a lengthy password. As a result, the land of Hyrule is vast for a game of its age, consisting of a large overworld which leads to nine separate maze-like dungeons. Combined, there's a total of 364 screens in the game, as well as a 'second quest' mode – unlocked by either beating the game or entering your name as ZELDA – which replaces the dungeon maps with different, trickier ones.

FACT

The layout of the third dungeon appears to be shaped like an inverted swastika. Don't throw your Zelda games in the fire, though: it's actually a 'manji', a Buddhist symbol of good fortune.

The Famicom Disk System was never released in the west, so when it was decided to bring The Legend of Zelda overseas Nintendo had to think of a new idea for game saves. Storage wasn't an issue as cartridge capacity had increased over time, but the lack of a writable floppy disc led to the creation of a new solution: the battery back-up. The Legend of Zelda was the first cartridge game that allowed players to save their progress directly onto the cart via an internal battery.

In many ways, The Legend of Zelda series has evolved drastically over the past three decades, but it speaks volumes of the first game's innovation that much of it – the exploration of dungeons, the Triforce, the 'you found a secret' jingle, the heart containers, the fairies, the use of arrows and bombs and boomerangs – remains ever-present throughout. ■

LEGENDARY WINGS

Year 1988
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

IN THE 220TH century (that's 20,000 years in the future, if you're counting), mankind builds a giant super computer to rule the planet and, for some bizarre reason, chooses to name it DARK. Predictably, the computer goes haywire and builds a fleet of robot warships to destroy humanity. Two nameless young chaps decide to stop DARK by building mechanical wings, grabbing the last remaining guns and missiles, and heading out to destroy each of DARK's underground bases.

Legendary Wings is a scrolling shooter that takes place over five stages, each split into two sections: one part vertically scrolling, the other horizontal. This differs from Capcom's original arcade version, where the horizontal shooting sections are instead 2D platforming stages. ■

FACT

The manual gives a different story to the back of the box (which is the one described). It's still about the survival of the human race, but instead the God of War Ares is the one who gives the two heroes their 'wings of love'.

LEGENDS OF THE DIAMOND

Year 1992
Publisher Bandai
Developer Tose

IT WAS RARE for a baseball game during the NES era to have real player names, but Legends of the Diamond took that one step further by instead featuring a roster of classic players from the past. You get to put together your own team by picking from a list of 30 legends, including the likes of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Ty Cobb, Hank Aaron and Dizzy Dean. You can then pit them against another team of legends in an exhibition game, or start a tournament mode where you play against a series of randomly-chosen squads. There are two baseball stadiums to choose from, named simply 'old' and 'new'. The old stadium, based on vintage ballparks, is smaller and so it's easier to hit home runs. ■

FACT

Although packaging designs are usually rigorously checked for errors, sometimes mistakes happen. The label on the cartridge for this game actually says 'Legends of the Daimond'.

LEMMINGS

Year 1992
Publisher Sunsoft / Ocean
Developer Ocean

ONE OF THE most popular puzzles games of all time, Lemmings was originally developed in Scotland by DMA Design (who went to become Rockstar Games) and was then ported to almost every existing and future system. It's a series of 100 progressively more difficult stages (split into four categories: fun, tricky, taxing and mayhem) in which the aim is to guide a group of lemmings to an exit. Lemmings are dopey creatures – well, these ones are, at least – so all they can do is walk in a straight line and turn back any time they hit an obstacle. That doesn't bode well in a world full of pits, lava, booby traps and deadly long drops, so it's up to you to help guide them along by assigning them tasks.

There are eight different tasks you can set Lemmings. Some of these are single commands that are only used once: Bashers, Miners and Diggers can create horizontal, diagonal or vertical tunnels in the scenery, while Builders create a diagonal 15-step stairway. Other tasks are permanent skills a Lemming retains: Climbers and Floaters can scale large walls and survive large falls respectively, while Blockers stand still and prevent other Lemmings from walking past them. Finally, there's the Bomber, which blows a Lemming up after a five-second countdown, taking some of the scenery with them. All 100 stages can be cleared using a combination of these skills, and while the NES version feels clunkier to play than some others (mainly due to the lack of mouse pointer controls), it's still undeniably Lemmings at its core. ■

FACT

Legendary author Terry Pratchett was so obsessed with the home computer version of Lemmings that he chose not only to delete it from his hard drive, but also to overwrite the disks so he wouldn't be tempted to reinstall it.

L'EMPEREUR

Year	1991
Publisher	Koei
Developer	Koei

ANOTHER IN KOEI'S long line of turn-based strategy games, but this one's set during the Napoleonic Wars and has you playing as the main man himself, Napoleon Bonaparte. Starting off as a young officer in charge of city affairs and the military, your initial job is to fight and defeat any belligerent nations that get in your way, rising in rank and being promoted to First Consul and then Emperor. Once you're the Emperor you can give your government various commands to execute domestic and foreign policy. There are four different scenarios, each covering a period of Napoleon's life. For example, by the final stage – set in March 1806 – his power has reached all over Europe, and your goal is to unify all 46 countries under France. ■

FACT

Contrary to popular belief, Napoleon wasn't actually as tiny as the jokes suggest. He was likely to have been around 5ft 6in (1.68m), about the average height for his era.

LES CHEVALIERS DU ZODIAQUE: LE LÉGENDE D'OR

Year	1987
Publisher	Bandai
Developer	Tose

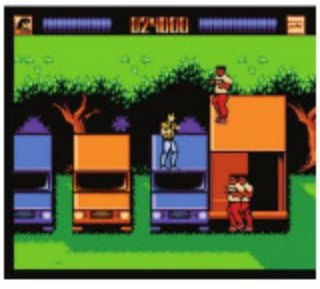
CLUB DOROTHÉE WAS a children's TV show broadcast on France's TF1 channel in the '80s and '90s. Like many children's shows it included cartoons, and since Japanese animation was relatively cheap to licence these included the likes of Dragon Ball Z, Sailor Moon and Saint Seiya (which was renamed Les Chevaliers du Zodiaque). Because of this, Bandai's Japan-only Saint Seiya game was given a France-only release, making it one of the most sought-after NES games for collectors. The game is part side-scrolling platform adventure, part turn-based RPG and revolves around Cosmo Points, a finite resource that's used for attacking and defending. It also asks you for your birthday when you start the game, as your star sign affects your character's stats. Capricorns are stronger, apparently. ■

FACT

The *Saint Seiya* manga ran from 1985 to 1990, while the anime ran from 1986 to 1989. The original 28-volume manga has sold over 34 million copies in Japan alone.

LETHAL WEAPON

Year	1993
Publisher	Ocean
Developer	Eurocom



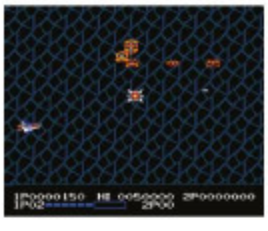
MARTIN RIGGS (MEL Gibson) and Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover) are a pair of tough LA cops. Riggs is a high-strung Vietnam vet, Murtaugh is a family man and a career cop. I smell chemistry! Released around the same time as the *Lethal Weapon 3* movie (with the film's poster doubling as the game's box art), this NES offering has the pair taking on three cases: an illegal weapons sale, an illegal currency exchange and a stolen cache of police weapons. Each stage also has you defusing a bomb (because it's Lethal Weapon). It's a beat 'em up similar to Double Dragon, but has far more emphasis on gunplay. Each character also has their own style: Riggs prefers hand-to-hand combat whereas Murtaugh prefers shooting perps. ■

FACT

The ending is a single image of a newspaper front page with the heading: 'Crime rate drops! Hero cops clean up streets.' Those three missions must have really helped.

LIFE FORCE

Year	1988
Publisher	Konami
Developer	Konami



THE SUCCESS OF Gradius encouraged Konami to create this spin-off, originally named Salamander (the EU version is actually called Life Force: Salamander). It's another shoot 'em up but this time its six levels alternate between scrolling horizontally (levels 1, 3, 5) and vertically (levels 2, 4, 6). There's also a two-player co-op mode, which was relatively uncommon for shoot 'em ups on the NES. While Player 1 controls the Vic Viper from Gradius (actually named the Vic Viper this time and not the Warp Rattler), Player 2 instead takes control of the RoadBritish Space Destroyer from the nearby planet Latis. Given the NES's limitations, it's perhaps no surprise that it looks identical to the Vic Viper, albeit a slightly redder shade. ■

FACT

According to the manual, the game is about blasting your way out of a giant alien which has swallowed the planets of Gradius and Latis. While the first few levels do start inside a creature, this is seemingly forgotten midway through and the game ends with a planet exploding for unclear reasons.

THE LION KING

Year 1995
Publisher Virgin Interactive
Developer Dark Technologies

FOLLOWING ON FROM its games based on *Aladdin* and *The Jungle Book*, Virgin's third Disney platformer was released to tie in with its latest movie, *The Lion King*. While other versions of the game follow the film's plot closely by starting with a young Simba and changing to an adult Simba later on, the NES version instead offers just six stages of young Simba gameplay, culminating in an oddly underwhelming and extremely easy boss fight with a grey gorilla who throws rocks at you. By the time The Lion King was ready for release in 1995, gamers had well and truly moved on to the 16-bit systems. As such, it didn't make it to North America, and was the last NES game ever released in Europe. ■

FACT

UK studio Dark Technologies (which only made three games) created The Lion King using a sound driver created by British composer David Whittaker. Whittaker says he didn't give permission to use it, and that it may have been stolen or reverse engineered.

LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL: CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES

Year 1990
Publisher SNK
Developer SNK

A BASEBALL GAME from SNK using the same engine as its 1989 title Baseball Stars. The difference, as the name suggests, is that the 16 teams on offer here are Little League Baseball squads. While eight of these teams are based in the US (including New York, California, Arizona and Illinois), the other eight come from other countries with Little League teams, such as Japan, Canada, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Chinese Taipei. You can choose between exhibition games or a Championship Series mode: this is a knockout tournament featuring all 16 teams, and you can choose to make any number of them player-controlled. Even none of them, if you're really keen on seeing an NES decide the winner of a tournament without giving it any input at all. ■

FACT

Little League Baseball began in Pennsylvania in 1938, and has grown to the point that it now lets boys and girls of all abilities take part in the sport in more than 80 countries.

THE LITTLE MERMAID

Year 1991
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

WHILE SEGA WAS given the rights to publish a game based on *The Little Mermaid* for its Mega Drive, Master System and Game Gear systems, Capcom still owned the licence for Disney games on Nintendo consoles. NES owners ended up getting a completely different game, then, and it turns out Capcom's offering was significantly better than Sega's critically panned release. Taking place over six stages, Ariel has to reach the evil Ursula's castle and stop her taking over the ocean. Ariel can fire bubbles at enemies to trap them in large bubble-like containers. She can then grab these bubble-fied baddies and throw them at other enemies to knock them both out. And don't worry, she still ends up with Prince Eric by the end. ■

FACT

The Little Mermaid was produced by Tokuro Fujiwara, a legendary developer who had senior roles in many classic games like Mega Man, Ghosts 'n Goblins, DuckTales and Resident Evil.

LITTLE NEMO: THE DREAM MASTER

Year 1990
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

THE KING OF Slumberland has been kidnapped by the evil King of Nightmares, which could be better. Little Nemo, a young lad who has incredibly creative dreams, is summoned to the royal palace of Slumberland and asked to rescue the king. *Little Nemo* was a vintage American comic strip that ran from 1905 to 1926, and in 1989 it was turned into an animated movie. This game is based on that film – a Japanese / American co-production – and is a platform game where the central mechanic is feeding animals candy. If you feed an animal enough candy you can merge with it and use its powers: feed a mole and you can dig through the ground, while feeding a frog lets you jump high into the air. ■

FACT

The movie, *Little Nemo: Adventures in Slumberland*, was a box office bomb, making around $1.3 million in total in the US. It fared better when it was released on VHS, though, selling around 1.5 million copies.

LITTLE NINJA BROTHERS

Year 1990
Publisher Culture Brain
Developer Culture Brain

JACK AND RYU are 'enthusiastic ninja boys' who, while watching TV one day, see a news report showing the evil Blu Boltar, leader of the Yoma Clan, declaring that he's holding the emperor of 'Chinaland' prisoner. Time to save the day, obviously. Little Ninja Brothers is an RPG that has you exploring the game world and its various villages in a similar way to the likes of Final Fantasy. When you encounter a random battle, however, the action switches not to a turn-based fight, but a top-down real-time fight similar to The Legend Of Zelda. Little Ninja Brothers is the second game in what's known in Japan as the 'Super Chinese' series: the first game was Kung Fu Heroes. ■

FACT

At one point in the game you take part in 'field training', which is basically a group of six mini-games: 50m dash, balloon popping, an 'athletic race', a treasure hunt, an eating contest and shooting.

LITTLE SAMSON

Year 1992
Publisher Taito
Developer Takeru

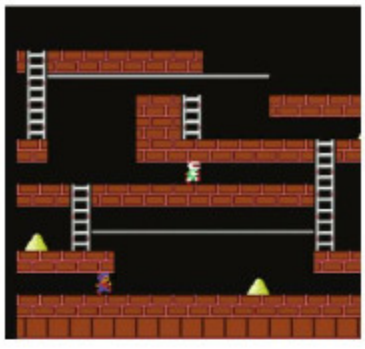
LITTLE SAMSON IS a platformer that, despite its name, actually has four heroes. The titular Little Samson is a kind-hearted lad who can climb walls and ceilings. Kikira the Dragon Lord, meanwhile, can fly for a short while and breathe fire, and also can't slip on ice. Then there's Gamm the Rock Lord, a Golem type chap who can extend his fists in all directions for a powerful attack, and walk over spikes without taking damage. Finally, KO the Enchanted Beast is a small mouse who can drop bombs and run over the surface of water. Each character has their own specific levels first, and once you beat those the team unites and you can choose who to play as from that point on. ■

FACT

Little Samson is one of the rarer NES games. A loose copy can sell for hundreds of dollars, and it isn't uncommon for a boxed copy to go for thousands.

LODE RUNNER

Year 1987
Publisher Broderbund
Developer Hudson Soft



AT THE TURN of the 1980s Doug Smith, an architecture student at the University of Washington, created a prototype game called Kong which could be played on the university computer. Over the next few years it evolved into Lode Runner, and was released in 1983 on home computers. A few years later, Hudson Soft developed a port for the NES: this had more cartoonish graphics and added features like music and scrolling screens. The aim of the game is to collect all the gold in each stage while avoiding the Bungelings, a group of guards. You're armed with a laser drill pistol but can't shoot anyone with it: you use it to dig holes that can be used to trap enemies and reach certain pieces of gold. ■

FACT

Lode Runner has its own level editor, which lets you create your own stages. It doesn't have the ability to save these stages, though, so it wasn't a very popular mode.

THE LONE RANGER

Year 1991
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

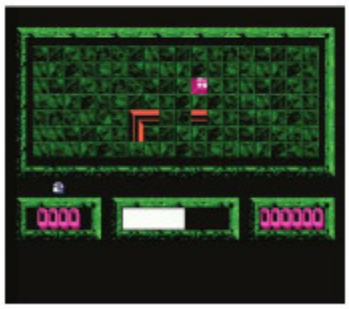
BASED ON THE much-loved TV and radio character, The Lone Ranger is a detailed action-adventure game with a wealth of play styles. The Ranger's nemesis Butch Cavendish has captured the President, so you have to head out and rescue him. Throughout your lengthy adventure – a flawless playthrough can take nearly three hours, a lot for an action game back then – you'll take part in side-scrolling run 'n gun sections, top-down exploration sections, horse racing sections atop your horse Silver and shooting gallery sections (which can be played using the Zapper, should you wish). Although some claim it's a jack of all trades and master of none, there's no denying the sheer variety of gameplay experiences on offer here. ■

FACT

Oxford, Michigan considers itself the 'Home of the Mask' as it was where Brace Breeme, the radio voice of the Lone Ranger, lived. There's an annual Lone Ranger parade there.

LOOPZ

Year 1990
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Bits Studios



LOOPZ IS A puzzle game reminiscent of Pipe Mania (or Pipe Dream, as it was known in the US) in that it's about creating unbroken paths. You're presented with an 18x7 grid and given a series of shapes: either a straight line or a bend, in either single square or multiple square forms. There's no 'next' indicator to show which shapes are coming, and you're given a very limited amount of time to place your shape on the grid. The aim is to lay down each shape to create a continuous line, and bring that line around so it eventually connects with itself to form a loop. This makes it disappear, and the process continues. There's also a puzzle mode where you must complete a loop with some shapes removed. ■

FACT

Loopz got a sequel called Super Loopz for the SNES and Amiga CD32. It's more of the same but is far prettier to look at and has new music.

LOW G MAN: THE LOW GRAVITY MAN

Year 1990
Publisher Taxan
Developer KID

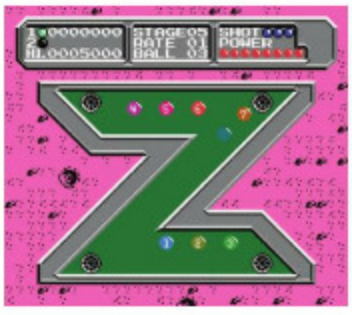
THE YEAR IS 2284 (in other words, a completely random number). Humans are so great at building robots that they've set up planets full of them, their purpose being to build even more robots. This idea backfires when an alien race reprograms one planet's entire robot population for war against the humans. It's up to Low G Man – armed with a low-gravity backpack, a spear and an electro-magnetic disruptor pistol – to destroy the robots and save the human race. This is an action platformer with a fairly obvious gimmick: your low-gravity backpack means you can jump extremely high, as if you were on the moon. As well as your normal weaponry you can also pilot a walker, a flying hover car and a 'spider vehicle'. ■

FACT

Your electro-magnetic pistol doesn't actually hurt the robots, it only makes them freeze. You then have to jump onto them while their guard's down and use your spear to destroy them.

LUNAR POOL

Year 1987
Publisher FCI
Developer Compile



POOL IS A pretty straightforward sport that you can only do so much with, so how could you possibly make a pool game that's unique? Simple: set it in space. Lunar Pool offers 60 different stages, each featuring a different table layout. These range from your standard rectangular table to arrow-shaped tables, Z-shaped ones and ones with jagged walls which make the balls bounce off in wild directions. Its main solo mode doesn't really play like a pool game and has its own rules: you have to keep potting balls to continue, and if you don't pot a ball within three shots you lose a life. You can also play against the CPU or another player: these modes play a little bit more like normal pool. ■

FACT

If you're looking for more intergalactic versions of Earth pastimes (and who isn't), check out Shufflepuck Cafe. It's an air hockey game where your opponents are a series of aliens.

MACH RIDER

Year 1986
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D2

IN THE YEAR 2112, Earth is invaded by some rather nondescript 'forces of evil'. As humanity's only hope, you have to race from sector to sector, looking for survivors, while destroying the enemy quad bikes patrolling the land. This is seemingly Nintendo's take on dystopian future movies like *Mad Max*, with desolate highway roads and ruined buildings in the background. You have to drive through each level, shooting or bumping enemies while avoiding obstacles like oil drums and rocks in the middle of the road. Mach Rider may have become one of Nintendo's 'forgotten' games over the years but its music was among the best of the NES's early offerings: a modern version of it featured in the Super Smash Bros. Melee and Brawl soundtracks. ■

FACT

The arcade version of Mach Rider showed your rider standing next to their bike after each level. A piece of armour was removed each time, until it was revealed she's a woman.Yes, Mach Rider did the 'your hero is actually female' thing before Metroid.

MAD MAX

Year 1990
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Mindscape

MACH RIDER MAY appear to have been inspired by the *Mad Max* movies, but it's probably fair to say they were slightly more influential on this game. Based on the second *Mad Max* film, the player controls Max (Mel Gibson) as he explores a post-apocalyptic wasteland in search of food, water, money and fuel for his Pursuit Special car. The aim is to trade food and water for a pass that gets you into the arena, where you battle with other enemies in a destruction derby style event. Win in three arenas and you get to face off in the final battle against 'the Ultimate Warrior', as the manual puts it. That's Lord Humungus, the leader of the Marauders, not the late professional wrestler. ■

FACT

The game has a password system, but the password for the last level is useless. Humungus can only be defeated with a crossbow, and if you start on the last level it's impossible to collect enough ammo to kill him.

THE MAFAT CONSPIRACY

Year 1990
Publisher Vic Tokai
Developer Aicom

ALTHOUGH YOU WOULDN'T know it by the title, The Mafat Conspiracy is the sequel to Golgo 13, the NES game based on the popular assassin-themed manga. This time the CIA has asked ace sharpshooter Golgo 13 to track down and eliminate the leader of the Mafat Revolutionary Group, destroy the system they've designed to bring down satellites, and rescue the scientist they kidnapped to create it. Much like its predecessor, The Mafat Conspiracy offers a mixture of game types, ranging from side-scrolling action platforming to first-person maze exploration. New to this sequel, though, are racing sections where you get to drive a Ferrari. As before, the manual gives the maps for all the maze sections, presumably due to their confusing and frustrating nature. ■

FACT

Three Golgo 13 arcade games were released in Japan. They're light gun games similar to the Silent Scope games, where the player uses a sniper rifle instead of the usual pistol or machine gun.

MAGIC DARTS

Year 1991
Publisher Romstar
Developer Romstar

SADLY, THERE ARE no disappearing dartboards, levitating contestants or darts that transform into snakes in Magic Darts: for the most part there's no magic to be found, unless the actual act of playing darts is one you consider magical (in which case, I admire your positivity). This is a standard darts game with six different rulesets to choose from: the standard 301, 501 and 701, Count Up (get the highest score with 24 darts), Round The Clock (hit numbers 1–10 in order) and the rather confusing Half It mode. There are 12 different types of player to choose from, ranging from generic male and female players to a ninja, a robot, a monkey and an alien. In hindsight, that's probably where the 'magic' bit comes into it. ■

FACT

One oddly specific option in Magic Darts is the ability to choose between three different weights for your darts. Light ones are more affected by inaccuracies in your throw.

MAGIC JOHNSON'S FAST BREAK

Year 1990
Publisher Tradewest
Developer Software Creations

A STAR NAME on your sports game can do wonder for sales, and by 1990 there were very few bigger names in basketball than Irwin 'Magic' Johnson. Tradewest happily snapped up his likeness for this, an extremely basic basketball game that actually doesn't have much to do with Magic other than his grinning face appearing on the screen every now and then when you pull off a good move. Consisting of nothing but two-on-two exhibition matches as either Team Red or Team Blue, the only options are whether you want one, two or four players (the latter using the NES Satellite or NES Four Score multitap adapters), and the difficulty level. Not the most effective use of the great man's name then, it could be argued. ■

FACT

Magic Johnson returned in Super Slam Dunk, a Virgin Games release for the SNES where he appeared before matches to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each team.

THE MAGIC OF SCHEHERAZADE

Year 1989
Publisher Culture Brain
Developer Culture Brain

HERE'S A TIP: if you want to make sure your new game is going to sell well, give it a title that children will be able to spell on their Christmas lists to Santa. The Magic of Scheherazade apparently missed this memo, naming its game after the storyteller in One Thousand and One Nights. The game's hero is a wizard who's lost his memory and all his magical powers. He has to regain them and rescue Scheherazade (his 'sweetheart') from the evil magician Sabaron. Confusing name aside, the game is a hidden gem: it's a lengthy RPG that's part Zelda-style adventure, part turn-based RPG, and you're able to travel between time zones in a way similar to the Light and Dark Worlds in Zelda: A Link to the Past. ■

FACT

In One Thousand and One Nights, Scheherazade is reading the book's stories to her new husband to kill time so he doesn't behead her at midnight like he did with his 1,000 previous wives. Bit harsh.

MAGICIAN

Year 1991
Publisher Taxan
Developer Eurocom

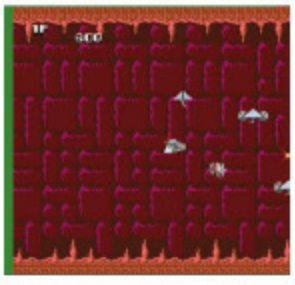
MERLWOOD WAS A small, peaceful country where everyone got along, with powerful magicians using their magic to make sure everyone was protected and safe. One day, one of the most powerful magicians – a moody sod called Abadon – decided he was sick of helping people, so he conjured up loads of evil monsters, told them to destroy all the other magicians, and ran off to build a big castle in the mountains. You play as Paul, a young apprentice magician, who has to stop him by finding the ancient Ultimate Potion. Magician's magic system is unique: you cast spells by combining syllables, with the right combinations triggering actions. For example, mi-ra-na-ra-st is a flying spell, while ph-na-hu gives you the brilliantly-named boomeraxe. ■

FACT

Not all of the magic spells you can discover are useful in your quest, some are just for fun. Entering the spell hu-hu-mi-hu-hu casts the spell 'Who's Who', which loads the game's credits.

MAGMAX

Year 1988
Publisher FCI
Developer Nihon Bussan



ALIENS HAVE TAKEN over the Earth and put the human race under the control of the super-powerful 'Computer Babylon'. You play as 'a brave man' who has to single-handedly take the aliens out. You won't be doing it alone, though: you'll be piloting MagMax, a transforming robot ship designed to be mankind's last hope. Initially starting off as a small ship, MagMax can fly over different body parts – a head, a set of legs and a wave beam gun – and attach them to its main body to create a giant walking mech capable of destroying anything. These body parts also serve as armour: take a hit while a body part is attached and you won't die, you'll just lose the part. ■

FACT

MagMax was originally a 1985 arcade game. Its promotional flyer quotes a US arcade owner: 'We only operate first rate games: Paperboy, Commando, 1942 and the top Konami pieces, and MagMax competes right up there with the best of them.'

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

Year 1988
Publisher LJN
Developer Atlus

ALTHOUGH A NUMBER of baseball games had already been released on the NES by this point, none of them had the official MLB teams and only RBI Baseball had real player names. Major League Baseball marked the first NES game to feature the official MLB licence, meaning all 26 (at the time) teams from the American and National Leagues were available in Exhibition, World Series or All-Star Game modes. LJN didn't, however, secure the MLBPA licence which would have allowed them to use player names, so to get around it the game lists all players by just their numbers instead. This means fans of the New York Mets, for example, can still easily identify Darryl Strawberry as being the team's left-handed number 18. ■

FACT

Although this was the first official MLB game on NES, it wasn't the first one ever. Mattel released Major League Baseball on the Atari 2600 and Intellivision in 1980, and 1984's MicroLeague Baseball also had the MLB licence.

MANIAC MANSION

Year 1990
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Lucasfilm Games / Realtime Associates

IT'S POSSIBLE THAT without Maniac Mansion, there would have been no Day of the Tentacle, no Secret of Monkey Island, no Lucasfilm adventure games in general. The creation of Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick, Maniac Mansion is a point-and-click horror comedy in which a group of teenagers led by college student Dave Miller find themselves in the home of a mad scientist who's kidnapped Dave's girlfriend Sandy. There are six teens in your group, and you have to choose two of them to join Dave (whose selection is compulsory). The order the game's story plays out, then, depends on the characters you choose. For example, if you choose Michael the photographer, he can help Ed (one of the mansion's residents) develop some film containing secret plans, which in turn convinces Ed to to help you out.

Maniac Mansion is much loved for its bizarre sense of humour and its controversial moments, but some of the latter were removed for the NES version of the game as part of some hefty censorship. These ranged from minor script changes (like removing the word 'kill') to a swimsuit calendar hanging up in one room, to even a classical nude statue. Despite this, a scene in which you put a hamster in a microwave and make it explode remained in the game intact: by the time Nintendo discovered it the game was already widely available in the US, but the scene was edited out for the PAL versions. ■

FACT

Maniac Mansion wasn't the last time a Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick game found its way onto a Nintendo system. Much more recently, their comeback project Thimbleweed Park was released on Nintendo Switch.

MAPPY-LAND

Year 1989
Publisher Taxan
Developer Tose

THE ORIGINAL MAPPY was a 1983 arcade game by Namco in which a police mouse called Mappy (based on the Japanese 'mapo', a slang term for a policeman) explored a house to collect stolen goods. Mappy-Land is a NES-only sequel to Mappy, and while it features similar gameplay at its core, everything's been greatly enhanced. Now there are eight distinct worlds, each with their own theme (including Railroad Town, Western World, Tropical World, Ghost World and the like). There are also stage-specific gimmicks that can be activated to hit enemies, such as a punching bag you jump up to hit in one level. Along the way you're constantly being pursued by Goro, a large cat, who dresses in different outfits to suit the stage's theme. ■

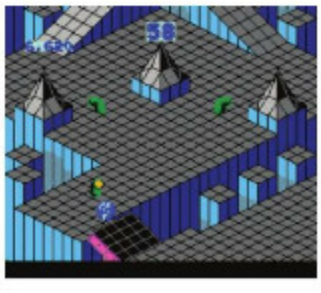
FACT

When the Wii's Virtual Console service started offering arcade games, the original Mappy was one of the first four games made available (alongside Gaplus, Star Force and The Tower of Druaga).

MARBLE MADNESS

Year 1989
Publisher Milton Bradley
Developer Rare

MARBLE MADNESS IS an isometric platform game where the player has to guide a marble down a series of obstacle courses while avoiding the enemies roaming around. There are six levels in total, starting with a simple 'practice' course and culminating in the incredibly difficult 'ultimate' stage. There's also a two-player competitive mode where both players try to descend each course at the same time in an effort to reach the bottom first: naturally, you're able to bash into your opponent and try to knock them into hazards or off the edge. Marble Madness continues to enjoy a cult following to this day: most recently, a recreation of one of its stages made an appearance in Warner Bros.' mash-up game Lego Dimensions. ■



FACT

Marble Madness was designed by Mark Cerny, who went on to either produce or design Sonic The Hedgehog 2, Crash Bandicoot, Spyro the Dragon, Ratchet & Clank and the PS4 and Vita hardware.

MARIO BROS.

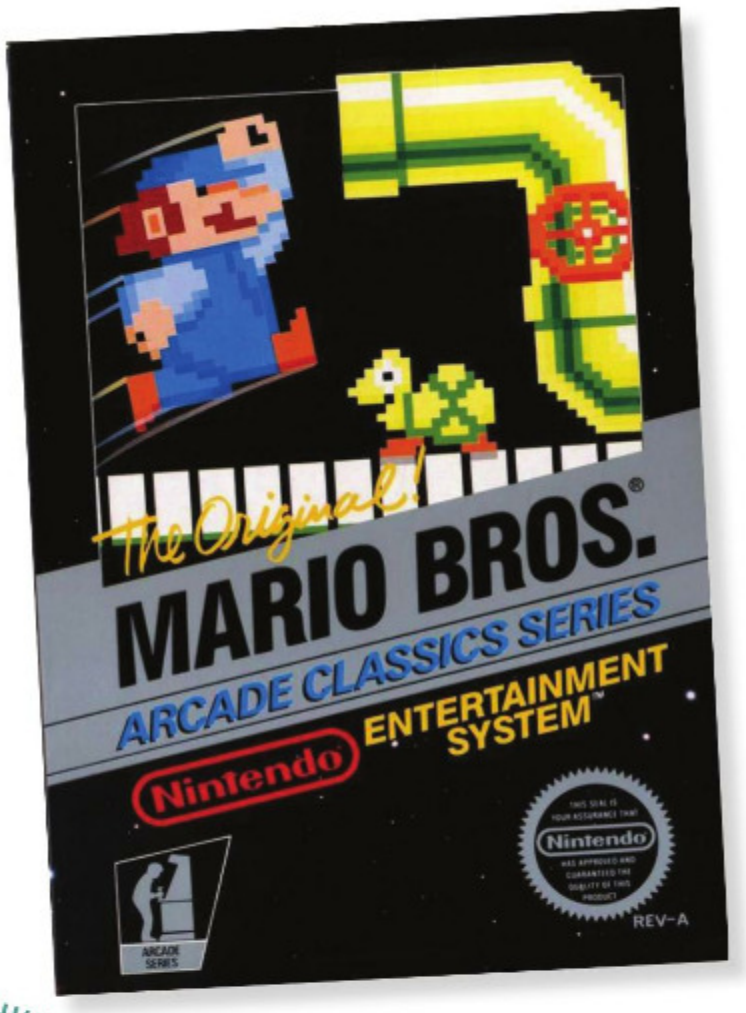
Year 1986
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1

ALTHOUGH MARIO IS well-known these days as a plucky plumber, that wasn't his trade of choice right at the beginning. In his debut appearance in Donkey Kong he was a carpenter instead, more likely to fix your bathroom door than your bathroom sink. When Mario Bros. came along, Mario switched over to a plunger, and the rest is history.

His first plumbing gig is a doozy, mind you, and sounds more like a job for an exterminator. A bunch of creatures are infesting the sewers, so it's up to Mario to head down there and get rid of the various bothersome beasties. Thankfully, he doesn't have to do it alone: the game's called Mario Bros. for a reason, and that reason is Mario's brother Luigi, who makes his first ever appearance here (sort of: the Mario Bros Game & Watch game was released four months before the arcade one). In this game, Luigi looks identical to Mario: it's exactly the same sprite, the only difference being that his overalls are green and white instead of blue and red.

Mario pros who may not have played Mario Bros. before will initially struggle to get to grips with it, because it's missing a lot of the central mechanics that Super Mario Bros. would later introduce as series standards. Mario and Luigi don't have that classic, satisfyingly long and arching jump introduced in their subsequent side-scrollers, instead having only two distinct types of leap: a long jump and a one that arcs high and only goes slightly forward (it's very similar to the jumping controls in Ice Climber).

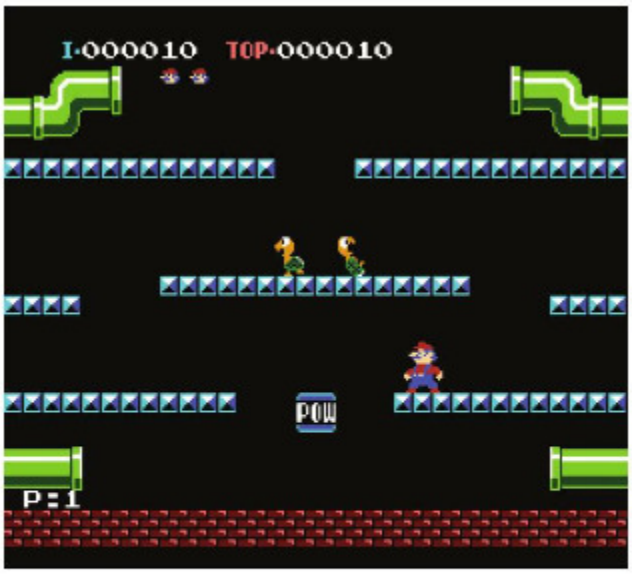
The means of disposing of your enemies differs from what's now considered the norm, too. Apparently Mario had yet to find effective footwear at this point, because jumping on enemies' heads will lead to your death, not theirs.



FACT

Mario Bros. also features the series' iconic green pipes for the first time. Shigeru Miyamoto added them because he needed a way to get the enemies back to the top of the screen, otherwise levels would just end with a sea of enemies trapped at the bottom.

The only way to kill bad guys in Mario Bros. is to jump up from underneath and hit the platform they're on (a technique copied over to Super Mario Bros.). This flips them onto their back: while they're struggling you have to jump over to them and run into them to kick them off the stage. If you fail to hit them quickly enough they'll flip back over, angrier and faster than before.



Although it's a very different game, then, Mario Bros. does still introduce some other series regulars (other than Luigi, of course). Bonus stages have you collecting coins for the first time in a Mario game, while the POW block – which creates a massive earthquake and kills anyone on the ground when it's triggered – was seen here first too. Koopa Troopas also make a debut of sorts here: they're simply referred to as 'turtles' (and the original arcade version calls them Shellcreepers), but they're undeniably the first draft of what would become an iconic Mario enemy.

Mario Bros. may not have stood the test of time as well as the 'Super' sequel that followed it (though 2-player co-op is still fun), but its importance in Nintendo's history can't be debated. Had it not been a success, Nintendo may never have decided to go ahead with its industry-defining follow-up. ■

MARIO IS MISSING!

Year 1993
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Radical Entertainment

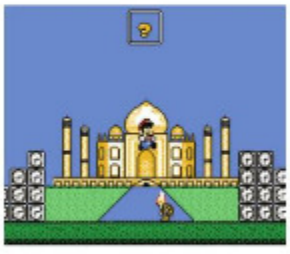
BOWSER AND HIS children have invaded the real world, trashing landmarks and stealing ancient artifacts. Usually it'd be up to Mario to save the day but this time he's been kidnapped too, so instead it's Luigi's time to shine. An 'edutainment' game designed to teach children about geography, Mario is Missing takes Luigi to various cities around the world. After finding out where they are, players have to use clues given to them by locals to recover three stolen artifacts from each city and place them back where they belong, while answering trivia questions. To make sure the learning process continues beyond the NES being turned off, the game's manual encourages parents to 'discuss current events relating to places that your child visits with Luigi'. ■

FACT

An enhanced version called Mario is Missing! CD-ROM Deluxe came to computers in 1994. It added over 100 video clips, so players could see how each of the game's landmarks look in real life.

MARIO'S TIME MACHINE

Year 1994
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Radical Entertainment



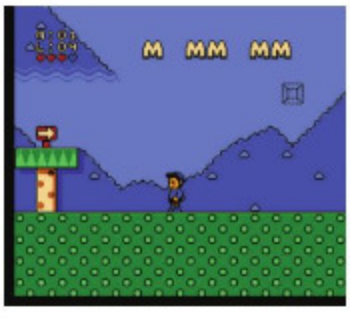
IT SEEMS BOWSER didn't get all that artifact-stealing out of his system in Mario is Missing!, because he's doing it again in Mario's Time Machine. This time, instead of travelling to different countries, he's built a time machine and is stealing key items from different time periods: Edison's lightbulb, the first Olympic flame and the like. Mario has to recover these artifacts (by playing a Mario Bros. style mini-game) then travel to different moments in time and use the information given there to figure out which item to return. There's a heavy emphasis on platforming here, even though Mario can't actually take damage. Interestingly, his sprite is based on that in Super Mario World, giving a rough idea of what SNES-era Mario looks like in 8-bit. ■

FACT

The SNES and PC versions of Mario's Time Machine are completely different. Instead of figuring out which artifact goes where, you're told where they go and instead have to answer questions about that time period when you get there.

M.C. KIDS

Year 1992
Publisher Virgin Interactive / Ocean
Developer Virgin Games



IN SIMPLER TIMES, a rare trip to McDonald's for dinner was maybe the single greatest thing that could happen in a child's life. The big M attempted to further its propaganda machine by enlisting Virgin Interactive to create an NES game based on the McDonalds characters. M.C. Kids (or McDonaldland as it was known in Europe) is a platformer in which two young lads by the names of Mick and Mack are asked by Ronald McDonald to track down the Hamburglar and retrieve Ronald's magic bag. While M.C. Kids borrows a lot from other platformers, you can't jump on enemies' heads to kill them. Instead, the game revolves around picking up and throwing blocks, meaning it feels more like Super Mario Bros. 2 at times. ■

FACT

Mick and Mack went on to star in a second McDonalds game, Global Gladiators, where they have to clean up toxic waste with water guns. An NES version was in development but was never finished.

MECHANIZED ATTACK

Year 1990
Publisher SNK
Developer SNK

WHAT APPEARS TO be just another revolution suddenly gets more interesting when reports come in that not only are the rebels using unusually high-tech weaponry, they may actually be a new breed of fighting robots hell-bent on taking over the entire world. Armed with an assault rifle, rocket launcher and grenades, you have to make it to the rebels' island base – shooting down gunboats, frogmen, helicopters, enemy soldiers and guard dogs along the way – and stop the rebel threat. Mechanized Attack is an on-rails light gun shooter from SNK similar to Taito's Operation Wolf. While it can be played with the Zapper, the way the gun works means you can only fire single shots at a time instead of the machine gun fire you get when using a controller. ■

FACT

There's a very well-hidden debug menu in the game that includes a sprite of a woman. By changing the options to set values, you can make the woman nude. Safe to say, Nintendo's censors didn't spot it.

MEGA MAN

Year 1987
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

OF ALL THE third-party games released on the NES, Mega Man is inarguably one of the most successful. After all, it's gone on to spawn more than 80 sequels, spin-offs and compilations: not bad going for a game that couldn't break a million sales.

Known as Rockman in Japan, Mega Man is a human-like robot who was created by two scientists, Dr Light (called Dr Wright in this version) and Dr Wily. The pair went on to create six more humanoids – Cut Man, Guts Man, Ice Man, Bomb Man, Fire Man and Elec Man – but then Dr Wily turned evil and reprogrammed them to help him take over the world. Mega Man now has to destroy each of these 'Robot Masters' and acquire their powers in order to take down Dr Wily for good. Even though it isn't for good, because there are another 10 Mega Man games, but even so. Other than being notorious for its difficulty, Mega Man is also notable for its non-linear progression. You can tackle the game's initial six stages in any order you like, gaining the Robot Masters' powers as you go. Some sequences are easier than others, though, because certain Robot Masters are weak against others' weapons. Your normal gun will kill Cutman after 10 shots, for example, but if you've already beaten Gutsman and gained his Super Arm you can throw the blocks in Cutman's arena and kill him with two hits. Mega Man's engaging gameplay and fantastic music meant it developed a small but devoted fanbase, enough to encourage Capcom to create a sequel.... ■

FACT

Mega Man creator Keiji Inafune is said to have blamed Mega Man's poor North American sales on its infamous 'old man in a weird yellow and blue space suit' box art, which was reportedly created in six hours by a Capcom marketer's friend.

MEGA MAN 2

Year 1989
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

IT WASN'T UNTIL the second game that Mega Man began to take off: it remains the best-selling Mega Man game with 1.5 million copies sold. Set in the year 20XX, Dr Wily is back with a new batch of Robot Masters: Wood Man, Clash Man, Quick Man, Heat Man, Metal Man, Air Man, Flash Man and Bubble Man. It's up to Mega Man to once again take them all out and inherit their powers, but this time he can also unlock three special transportation items. These let him place platforms on the screen and come in three flavours: static 'levitation platforms', side-moving 'jet sleds' and ascending 'elevator platforms'. These go some way to helping the player get through the game's punishingly tough (yet brilliantly addictive) stages. ■

FACT

Mega Man 2's box art was much improved over the first game's, but fans still point out that Mega Man is firing a pistol instead of his built-in arm cannon. Artist Marc Ericksen is taking no blame for it: he claims someone at Capcom told him it was a pistol.

MEGA MAN 3

Year 1990
Publisher Capcom / Nintendo
Developer Capcom

HE'S CALLED DR WILY for a reason, you know. The evil scientist is back for a third time, but claims he's seen the error of his ways. He and Dr Light team up to make a peace-keeping robot called Gamma, but a new bunch of Robot Masters go haywire and steal the power crystals needed to make Gamma run. Mega Man must stop Magnet Man, Snake Man, Needle Man, Hard Man, Gemini Man, Spark Man, Shadow Man and Top Man (not named after the UK men's fashion retailer), along with Dr Wily, who obviously turns evil again. This time Mega Man has a new slide move and can also summon his robot dog Rush, who can turn into a springboard, jet and submarine. ■

FACT

Mega Man 3 sees the debut of Proto Man, known here as Break Man. It soon emerges that Proto Man is Mega Man's older brother, a sort of prototype version of him.

MEGA MAN 4

Year 1992
Publisher Capcom / Nintendo
Developer Capcom

DR WILY IS finally dead! Well, at least he seems to be. But there's no time to relax: there's another dodgy scientist doing the rounds. A Russian brainiac called Dr Cossack has unleashed eight new Robot Masters – Toad Man, Bright Man, Pharaoh Man, Ring Man, Dust Man, Skull Man, Dive Man, and Drill Man – and instructed them to take over major cities. Time for Mega Man to do his thing and investigate whether Wily really is dead after all (spoiler: of course he isn't). Mega Man 4 carries over the slide move and Rush from the previous game, but also adds a new 'Mega Buster' technique, which involves holding down the B button to charge up a more powerful shot. ■

FACT

The eight Robot Masters in Mega Man 4 were the result of a Japanese design competition for fans. The eight winners got a special 'golden cartridge' version of the game. Good luck getting your hands on one of those eight carts today.

MEGA MAN 5

Year 1992
Publisher Capcom / Nintendo
Developer Capcom

PROTO MAN, MEGA Man's older brother and apparent good guy, has turned up with eight new Robot Masters and is hell-bent on destroying the world. Realising this isn't really like him, Mega Man heads out to defeat the Robot Masters – Star Man, Gravity Man, Gyro Man, Stone Man, Crystal Man, Charge Man, Napalm Man, and Wave Man – and find out what's going on (he's actually a Dr Wily robot called Dark Man in disguise). Mega Man 5 plays similarly to its predecessors, but is known for being the easiest of the NES Mega Man games. Players can also collect lettered circuit boards on each stage – spelling out 'MEGA MAN V' – to get Beat, a robot bird who can attack enemies on Mega Man's behalf. ■

FACT

Most early Mega Man games credit artist Keiji Inafune as Inafking. Though it seems clear that he's calling himself a king, it's actually a reference to the character Snufkin from the 1969 anime series *Moomin*.

MEGA MAN 6

Year 1994
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Capcom

DR WILY IS gone, and a new Global Robot Alliance has been formed to make sure it stays that way. A mysterious man known as Mr X (wonder who that could be) hosts a tournament for the world's greatest peacekeeping robots, but before it starts he reveals that the eight best contestants – Blizzard Man, Centaur Man, Flame Man, Knight Man, Plant Man, Tomahawk Man, Wind Man and Yamato Man – are now under his control and ready to take over the world. Cue Mega Man, yet again. The sixth game in the series gives each stage two possible routes, and also introduces new Rush Adaptors: two special power-ups that merge Mega Man with Rush to create the power to fly or destroy large blocks. ■

FACT

Capcom didn't want to publish Mega Man 6 in America because it wanted to move on to the SNES. Nintendo published it instead, to help promote its new $50 top-loading NES-101 model. It wasn't released at all in Europe.

MENDEL PALACE

Year 1990
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Game Freak

YEARS BEFORE PIKACHU, Bulbasaur and pals dominated Game Boy screens worldwide, Pokémon developer Game Freak worked on a bunch of other titles for the NES, Game Boy and Mega Drive. Its first ever release was Mendel Palace (known as Quinty in Japan), a strange action puzzle game consisting of 100 stages, each featuring a 7×5 grid. Playing as a boy called Bon-Bon out to rescue his friend Candy, you have to defeat the evil dolls on each level by flipping and sliding the tiles they're standing on in an attempt to push them off the edge of the stage. If the 100 levels on offer aren't enough for you, you can press Start, Select and Reset at the same time to access 100 bonus levels. ■

FACT

Before Game Freak was a development studio, it was a Japanese games fanzine. Satoshi Takiji wrote the words and Ken Sugimori illustrated it: the pair then founded the studio and eventually worked together to create Pokémon.

METAL GEAR

Year 1988
Publisher Ultra Games / Konami
Developer Konami

IN 1987, 24-YEAR-OLD Hideo Kojima designed and directed a video game for the MSX2 computer in Japan. Its name was Metal Gear. Later that year it was ported to the Famicom, and then in 1988 it made it overseas to the NES. And thus began one of the most well-loved series in gaming history.

Metal Gear puts you in control of Solid Snake, a rookie member of a special forces group called FOXHOUND. Snake has to infiltrate Outer Heaven, a small nation on the outskirts of South Africa, and destroy Metal Gear – the 'ultimate super weapon' – to stop its creator Colonel Vermon CaTaffy taking over the world. At least, that's what the box and manual say. In reality, CaTaffy isn't actually in the game: he was a character created by Konami's localisation team. Instead, it's actually Big Boss, Snake's commander, who turns out to be behind Outer Heaven and Metal Gear.

FACT

The box art for Metal Gear is notorious for being a suspiciously similar to (i.e. an almost direct tracing of) a publicity still of Michael Biehn playing Kyle Reese in The Terminator.

Even in this primitive form, the first Metal Gear laid out many mechanics that would be carried over to the more famous Metal Gear Solid games for PlayStation systems. Stealth is the order of the day, with enemies calling for backup if you're spotted, and you've got your transceiver which lets you covertly chat with Big Boss or other resistance members. It isn't entirely ahead of its time, though: there are plenty of dodgy translation issues that were prevelant in the NES era, including gems like 'the truck have started to move' and 'I feel asleep'. ■

METAL MECH: MAN & MACHINE

Year 1991
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Sculptured Software

IN THE YEAR 2025, a bunch of mechanical aliens called Metal Mechs invade Earth. A group of scientists are able to catch one of the Metal Mechs and plan to use it to enter the alien strongholds and destroy the Alien Queen. You play as Tony, the ace pilot chosen for the task. It would appear the aliens have been watching *Robocop*, because your Metal Mech looks near identical to the ED-209 robot from Orion's hit action movie. Controlling your mech is a deliberately clunky affair, its powerful armour making up for the inevitable barrage of gunfire you'll be hit with along the way. As in Blaster Master, Tony can leave the mech to enter smaller passageways, though he's obviously far more vulnerable like this. ■

FACT

Although it's never explicitly specific which city the game takes place in, the presence of 'twin towers' in the second level and a set of bins that say 'NYSD' suggests you're in New York.

METAL STORM

Year 1991
Publisher Irem
Developer Tamtex

HOPEFULLY YOU AREN'T too attached to Neptune, because in 2501 it's destroyed. It's due to a powerful laser gun on a Pluto battle station, which was put there by Earthlings to save everyone from alien attack but has malfunctioned (isn't it always the way) and is now attacking every planet in the solar system. You have to infiltrate the battle station using the M-308 Gunner mech and trigger the laser's self-destruct device. Metal Storm is a run-and-gun type game with a fun gravity gimmick: if you press Up + A gravity will be reversed and you'll be able to walk on the ceiling, until you press Down + A to restore the gravity. This makes for some particularly entertaining and topsy-turvy boss battles. ■

FACT

Going against the trend, Metal Storm was released in North America more than a year before it came to Japan. The Famicom version has slightly tweaked graphics and a new intro sequence.

METROID

Year	1987
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D1

THE SIXTH SENSE? Saw it coming. *The Empire Strikes Back*? Meh. *Psycho*? All well and good, but for some the most memorable twist in the history of entertainment was when you completed Metroid and it was revealed that Samus Aran, the kick-ass hero you've been guiding to the end of the game for hours, was – gasp! – a woman the entire time. Even the poor sod who wrote the game's manual was fooled, constantly referring to Samus as 'he' throughout.

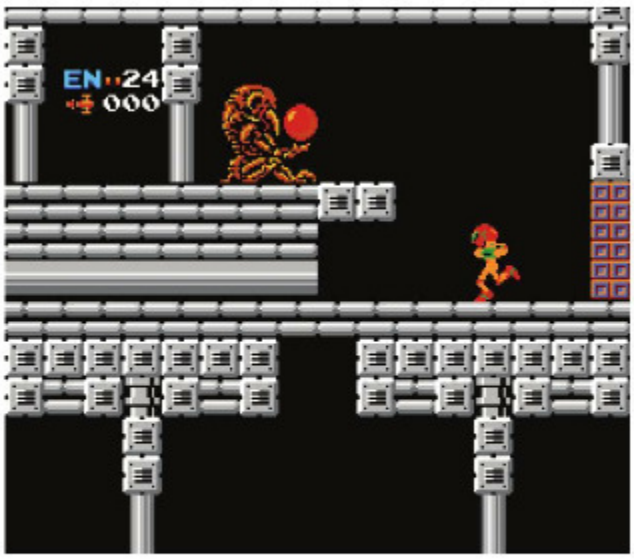
It's a little harder to appreciate the significance now we live in an age of Lara Croft, Jill Valentine, Chun-Li and Bayonetta, but in the mid-80s the most notable female protagonist in gaming was still Ms Pac-Man: the idea of a woman being the star of an action-packed, futuristic space adventure was revolutionary. In gaming, at least. In hindsight, players should have seen it coming: Metroid was clearly based on Ridley Scott's 1979 sci-fi horror film *Alien* – designer Yoshio Sakamoto has said it was a huge influence – meaning Samus was Nintendo's answer to Sigourney Weaver's heroic character Ellen Ripley. And though it was nowhere near as widely discovered, Nintendo had already toyed with the 'surprise! It's a woman' twist in the arcade version of Mach Rider.

Of course, this landmark move may have been lost in history had Metroid itself not been the ground-breaking video game it was. Set in the year 20X5 (so at most it's now 80 years away), it tells the story of a group of Space Pirates attacking a deep-space research spaceship and seizing a capsule containing a lifeform that may just have been responsible for wiping out the entire civilisation of the nearby Planet SR388. Samus, a bounty hunter with a cybernetic suit, is chosen by the Galactic Federation to travel to the Space Pirates' fortress on the planet Zebes and destroy Mother Brain, the giant mechanical organism that controls the base.

FACT

There are two well-known passwords for Metroid. Enter NARPAS SWORD to get all your power-ups, infinite ammo and special ice beam. Enter JUSTIN BAILEY and you can play as Samus in a pink leotard instead of her Power Suit.

As the game that first laid the seeds for what would become known as the Metroidvania genre (Castlevania didn't really fit into it until the PlayStation era), Metroid is a non-linear action platformer where the player is free to explore the Zebes fortress. Some areas of the world are impossible to reach at the start of the game, however, which means Samus needs to discover new upgrades and abilities that will let her access them.



These upgrades include the Morph Ball, or Maru Mari, as it's named in the manual: based on the Japanese marumaru which means 'to roll into a ball'. As the name suggests, it lets Samus compress herself into a small ball and fit into tiny tunnels and openings. The High Jump and Bomb power-ups, meanwhile, let Samus leap up to higher platforms and destroy barriers respectively.

Metroid was a seminal game in many ways, and its influence continues to be clear to this day: not just in the Metroid series itself, which is set to continue with Metroid Prime 4 on Switch, but in the numerous modern games that still make use of the 'earn upgrades, backtrack and reach places you couldn't before' formula it helped make popular. ■

MICHAEL ANDRETTI'S WORLD GP

Year 1990
Publisher Sammy
Developer Human Entertainment

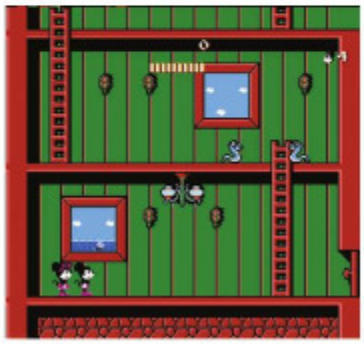
ALTHOUGH MICHAEL ANDRETTI wouldn't become a Formula One driver until signing up with McLaren in 1992, this 1990 NES game – released when he was still an IndyCar racer – presumably had some sort of crystal ball, as it instead features the 16 FIA Formula One tracks. Players can take on a series of Grand Prix races in an attempt to become the world champion, or play single practice races. Unlike most other NES racing games at the time, which let you zip around with ease, braking is actually important here for getting round the corners. Half the screen is taken up with the course map, in an attempt to really drive home the point (pun intended) that sharp corners need to be taken at lower speeds. ■

FACT

The other cars are driven by real-life F1 drivers, though their names have been changed. Prost, Senna, Berger, Piquet and Mansell become Brost, Zenna, Gerger, Pequet and Manselo.

MICKEY MOUSECAPADE

Year 1988
Publisher Capcom
Developer Hudson Soft



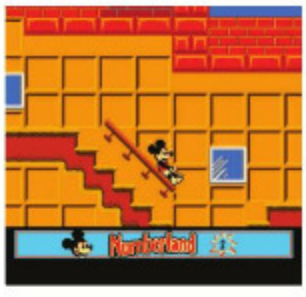
MICKEY AND MINNIE are searching for 'their mystery friend', so they have to make their way through five different stages – a fun house, the ocean, the woods, a pirate ship and a castle – to find her. Mickey Mousecapades (or just Mickey Mouse, as the title screen puts it) is a fairly standard platformer where you control both Mickey and Minnie (similar to Sonic and Tails in Sonic 2) and fire stars at enemies. After beating the final boss (Sleeping Beauty's Maleficent), it's revealed that the 'mystery friend' is Alice from Alice in Wonderland. In the Japanese version this isn't such a mystery, given that Alice is featured prominently on the box and the game's called Mickey Mouse: Adventures in Wonderland. ■

FACT

If you open the Mickey Mousecapade cartridge up and look at the circuit board, there's a small Mickey Mouse silhouette carved into it.

MICKEY'S ADVENTURE IN NUMBERLAND

Year 1994
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer Beam Software



THE SECOND OF two educational games starring Mickey Mouse, in this one Big Bad Pete has stolen the number moulds from Numberland, meaning its citizens can't make any more numbers. Mickey has to travel through ten stages, collect each mould and return all ten to Sheriff Donald. The game is a platformer in which each stage specifies a 'magic number', starting with 1. Mickey has to collect as many of these numbers as he can in each stage to build his score, then at the end of each stage he has to solve a basic number problem to get the mould. There are three difficulty levels to make the game suitable for all ages: only in the highest level can Mickey take damage. ■

FACT

Although the game's box and manual go with the singular Mickey's Adventure in Numberland, the title screen instead goes with 'Adventures'.

MICKEY'S SAFARI IN LETTERLAND

Year 1993
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer Beam Software

RELEASED A YEAR before Mickey's number-based adventure, Safari in Letterland follows much the same principle, except it deals with the alphabet instead. This time Mickey is an archaeologist, and he's looking for the ancient Stone Alphabet Tablets, which are the earliest example of our alphabet. As with Numberland, it's a platform game where Mickey has to avoid enemies and collect items. There are three letter jewels and a tablet in each stage: get the tablet and it'll be added to your collection, while getting all three jewels will spell out a word and reward the player with a picture. After clearing out the swamp, forest, pyramid, jungle and Caribbean stages, Mickey delivers all 26 tablets to museum curator Ludwig von Drake, and the Alphabet Song plays. ■

FACT

Both the Letterland and Numberland games feature a bunch of Mickey sound clips, which are quite advanced for the NES. Mickey will say each number and letter when necessary, and will also quip 'oh boy' and do his famous laugh.

MIGHT AND MAGIC: SECRET OF THE INNER SANCTUM

Year 1992
Publisher Sammy
Developer G-Amusements

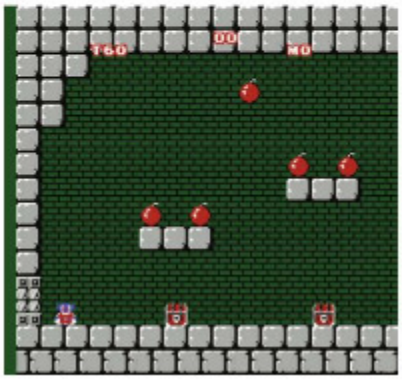
THE FIRST IN the massively popular Might and Magic series of RPG games, this launched on the Apple II back in 1986 and received a number of other home computer ports before finally coming to the NES six years later. It starts with a deliberately vague quest – find the mysterious Inner Sanctum and discover its secrets – but along the way introduces a side plot about a tyrannical usurper (the worst kind of usurper) named Sheltem. There are six classes of character to choose from – paladin, cleric, knight, archer, sorcerer and robber – as well as five races: human, elf, dwarf, gnome and half-orc. As one of the last versions of the game released, its improved graphics and music make it the preferred port among most fans. ■

FACT

As further evidence of Nintendo's more family-friendly requirements, 'minotaur dung' in Might and Magic is replaced with 'squishy slime', and the Volcano God is instead the Volcano Giant.

MIGHTY BOMB JACK

Year 1987
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo



MIGHTY BOMB JACK is a sequel to plain old Bomb Jack, an arcade game with a cult following in the UK due to its release on practically every home computer in the mid '80s. In this follow-up, pint-sized superhero Jack enters a giant pyramid in an attempt to defeat the king demon Belzebut and rescue King Pamera, his queen and their princess. Each of the game's 16 stages are made of two parts: side-scrolling sections with secret passageways and treasure chests, and single-screen sections (similar to the first game) where you have to collect every bomb to proceed. Since you're in a pyramid, things get more complex as the game progresses, with secret passages taking you further forward or looping you back to an earlier stage. ■

FACT

Bomb Jack got a different sequel on home computers. Bomb Jack II was developed by UK studio Elite Systems and played a lot more like the first game.

MIGHTY FINAL FIGHT

Year 1993
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

AS NOTED ELSEWHERE in this book, Final Fight is part of that holy trinity of beat 'em ups – along with Double Dragon and Streets of Rage – that most people think of when discussing the genre. The problem was, Final Fight was far too detailed to get a straight NES port, so Capcom decided to make this 'chibi' (small and cute) version of the game.

As in the arcade version, the Mad Gear gang has kidnapped Mayor Mike Haggar's daughter Jessica, though the reason is different. Whereas in the arcade game Jessica has been kidnapped as punishment for Haggar's refusal to accept a bribe to stop a crackdown on the gang's crime spree, here she's been kidnapped because the leader of the gang has simply fallen in love with her. Still creepy, but more in line with typical child-friendly NES storylines.

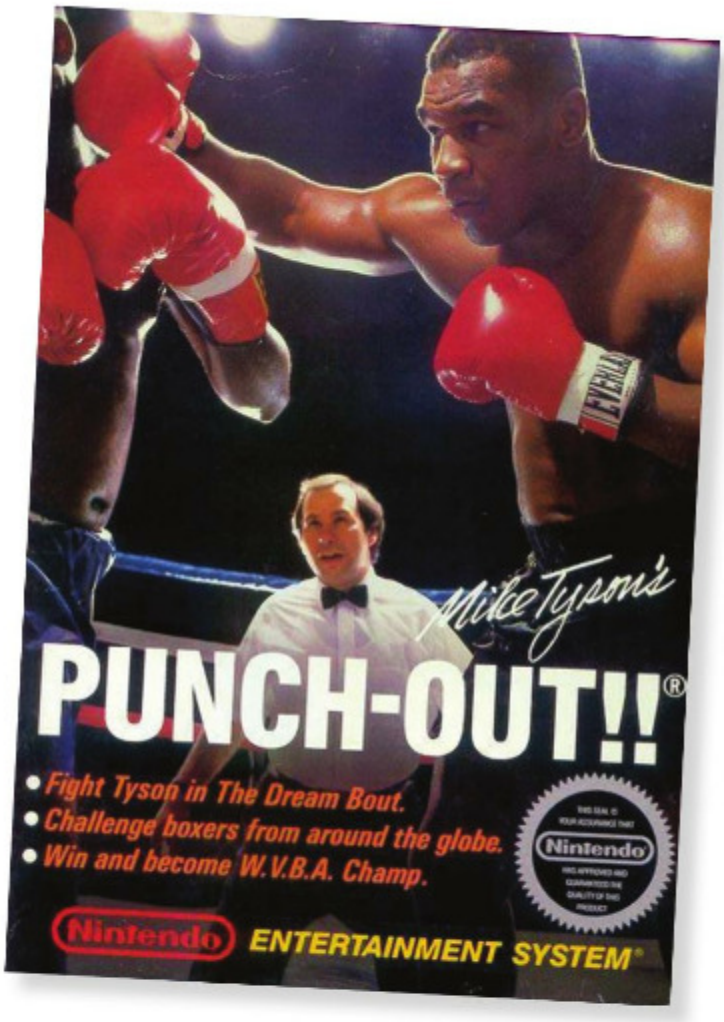
Mighty Final Fight is a relatively faithful rendition of the full-fat experience, despite its obvious graphical differences. It even builds on the original by introducing an experience points system, where you can level up and gain more power, health and eventually a new fighting move. More impressively, it manages to include all three of the arcade game's playable characters – Guy, Cody and Haggar – something the SNES version was unable to do. That said, the SNES game removed two-player co-op, which it seems was also a step too far for this NES reimagining: you're going to have to rescue Jessica and restore order to Metro City on your own here. ■

FACT

Much like the SNES version, Mighty Final Fight makes some changes to keep in line with Nintendo's family-friendly image. Boss enemies Damnd and Sodom had their names changed to the less controversial Thrasher and Katana.

MIKE TYSON'S PUNCH-OUT!!

Year	1987
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D3



WHILE MOST OF Nintendo's early NES games were original titles, a number of them – Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong Jr, Mario Bros. – were ports of arcade games. Punch-Out!! and its sequel Super Punch-Out!! hit arcades in 1984 and 1985 respectively, but a number of advanced techniques – a two-screen layout, massive opponent sprites and a transparent protagonist – meant a straight like-for-like NES version wasn't really possible.

To combat this, Genyo Takeda (producer of the arcade versions and director of the NES one) decided to make some changes. All the information on the arcade games' second screen – the score, the timer, the round – were easily compressed into a small strip running along the top. The hero, Little Mac, was no longer a transparent green wireframe character: he was now a tiny boxer who stood at the bottom of the screen, his smaller size having the advantage of making his opponents look bigger and giving the game a David vs Goliath feel.

As for the opponents, Takeda and his team were keen not to make them any smaller, so as not to ruin that effect, but the standard NES hardware could generally only deal with sprites no bigger than 8x16 pixels. This was resolved with the MMC2, a special chip created for the cartridge which allowed much larger sprites to be used.

Punch-Out!! has the player controlling Little Mac as he fights his way through three leagues: the Minor Circuit (three fights), Major Circuit (four fights) and World Circuit (six fights). His opponents are a weird and wonderful selection of characters and ever-so-slightly offensive stereotypes, from cowardly Frenchman Glass Joe to alcoholic Russian Soda Popinski, known as Vodka Drunkenski in the arcade game before having his name changed for the NES version (for obvious reasons).

FACT

Little Mac's trainer in the game is Doc Louis, a chunky chap who gives advice in between rounds. Players actually got to fight him in Doc Louis's Punch-Out!!, a special version of the Wii sequel that was made available to Club Nintendo members in North America.

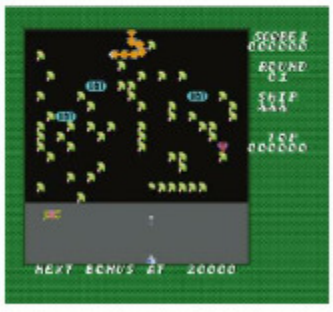
Perhaps the most notable of these fighters is King Hippo, an enormous 'tropical chief' from the South Pacific. He was such a popular opponent that he featured as one of the antagonists in the Saturday morning Nintendo cartoon *Captain N*, along with Dr Wily from Mega Man, Mother Brain from Metroid and the Eggplant Wizard from Kid Icarus.

Each of these battles plays more like a boss fight than a normal boxing match. Little Mac can throw left or right punches, either high or low, and can also dodge to the side or block. While the player can sometimes get the odd punch in, by far the most effective way to play the game is to dodge an opponent's attack then counter while they're stunned. Each opponent has tell-tale attack signs that the players must learn so they can anticipate moves, so each fight becomes a sort of reaction-based puzzle to crack.

After defeating all 13 opponents, Little Mac faces off against none other than Mike Tyson, the undefeated 'baddest man on the planet' and WBA, WBC and IBF heavyweight champion (Tyson won the IBF title just two days before the game launched). As you'd expect, he's nearly unbeatable. The Tyson deal only lasted three years: skip to Punch-Out!! in this book to see what happened when it ran out. ■

MILLIPEDE

Year 1988
Publisher HAL Laboratory
Developer HAL Laboratory



IN 1980, ATARI released the arcade hit Centipede, in which the player had to destroy every segment of a lengthy creature as it scuttled down the screen. In 1982 its sequel, Millipede, added a bunch of extra enemies to get in the way of your progress, as well as new DDT bombs which could be shot to destroy anything around them. Millipede eventually found its way onto the NES a whole six years later, courtesy of HAL. It's a fairly faithful port of the arcade version, though it doesn't quite manage to match its vertical screen layout. It also contains the action within a smaller playfield, a move that means a lot of screen estate is left empty. A curious port of a classic. ■

FACT

Millipede was also released on the Game Boy Advance in a 3 in 1 cartridge along with Lunar Lander and Super Breakout. It was a more faithful rendition despite the widescreen display.

MILON'S SECRET CASTLE

Year 1988
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

POOR MILON. HE lives in the land of Hudson, where people communicate with music, but he isn't able to. One day, when paying a visit to Queen Eliza at the Secret Castle, an Evil Warlord turns up. He takes the townsfolk's musical instruments and traps Queen Eliza deep inside the castle. Milon volunteers to rescue her: though it's not clear how, seeing as he can't communicate and all. The game is a platformer set over four floors of the castle. Milon's movement is based on momentum, meaning players need to get a good run-up before he can perform a long jump. This, combined with the enemy's ability to sap the player's health quickly (Milon doesn't blink when hit) has made Milon's Secret Castle notorious for its difficulty. ■

FACT

Milon starred in a Japan-only sequel for the Super Famicom called DoReMi Fantasy. It consisted more of standard side-scrolling platforming, rather than exploring a castle.

THE MIRACLE PIANO TEACHING SYSTEM

Year 1990
Publisher The Software Toolworks
Developer The Software Toolworks

IF NOTHING ELSE, you have to praise the Miracle system for its sheer ambition. This was a $500 game consisting of the cartridge and, more notably, a full-sized 49-key MIDI piano keyboard. After plugging the keyboard into the NES via the controller port, players were given access to hundreds of lessons, with the promise that they'd learn to play the piano within six to twelve months. There are some mini-games designed to help make the process fun: the Shooting Gallery, for example, has ducks flying across a musical staff, and the player needs to press the key corresponding to the note they're on. It also teaches players to play a handful of popular songs, including the *Star Wars* theme and *Let's Go Crazy* by Prince. ■

FACT

The Miracle's keyboard could be played like a normal keyboard if you ran it through a stereo system. It included 127 instrument sounds, from the standard grand piano to a banjo or frog 'ribbits'.

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

Year 1990
Publisher Ultra Games / Palcom
Developer Konami

IN 1988, AMERICAN network ABC revived the much-loved '60s spy series *Mission: Impossible* with a new series that brought back Peter Graves as secret agent Jim Phelps. Konami's NES game is based on this reboot, and has the player controlling three other IMF agents – Max, Grant and Nicholas – while Phelps takes a back seat. Making their way through Moscow, Venice, Berlin, Switzerland and Cyprus, the trio have to rescue Dr O and agent Shannon Reed from an evil organisation called the Sinister Seven. This top-down game plays like a faster Metal Gear, and mixes things up with a couple of vehicle stages. Bizarrely, the final boss is a computer that challenges you to play a tic-tac-toe style game against it until it gets bored. ■

FACT

The game's Sinister Seven actually consists of eleven villains, with such terrible names as Fido T. Flamethrower, Jean Claude Killer, Pistol Pete Piranovich and Willie the Water Demon.

MONOPOLY

Year 1991
Publisher Parker Brothers
Developer Sculptured Software

LET'S FACE IT: a gaming system isn't entirely complete without a version of the world's most popular board game on it. The NES version was part of a range of Monopoly ports by Sculptured Software, who also developed ones for the Game Boy, Game Boy Color, SNES and Mega Drive. It's a pleasantly fast-paced version of the game – it's possible to complete an eight-player game against seven CPU opponents in less than an hour – and features a game editor mode which allows you set each player's cash and properties and even place houses and hotels on the board before starting. There are also eight preset scenarios for four players, where each already has a number of properties to their name. ■

FACT

The real-life board game version of Monopoly has a Nintendo edition, where the properties are replaced with characters from Super Mario, Animal Crossing, Kirby, Metroid and Zelda. The railway stations are Epona, a Mario Kart, Samus's gunship and a Pikmin onion.

MONSTER IN MY POCKET

Year 1992
Publisher Konami / Palcom
Developer Konami

POKÉMON, YOU SAY? Pffft. Toy company Mattel had already started its own line of literal pocket monsters in 1989. Monster in My Pocket was a series of tiny rubber creatures, with well over 200 different species released during its run. The NES game lets you choose between two 'good' monsters, Vampire and The Monster (based on Frankenstein's monster), and asks you to guide them out of their child owner's bedroom, out into the street and towards Monster Mountain to face the evil Warlock. Along the way you encounter other monster bosses, including Bigfoot, Medusa and the Kraken. It came with an actual Monster in My Pocket figure which was exclusive to the game: Blemmyes, a headless monster with its eyes and mouth on its chest. ■

FACT

An Asian bootleg version of Monster in My Pocket called Batman & Flash was released. It's exactly the same game, with the hero character sprites replaced with DC's superheroes.

MONSTER PARTY

Year 1989
Publisher Bandai
Developer Human Entertainment

IT'S A MONSTER party, and everyone's invited! Well, except Europe. As young Mark is walking home from a baseball game, a winged monster called Bert swoops down from the sky and asks him to help get rid of the evil monsters in the Dark World. Mark reluctantly agrees, so off he goes to take on a wide variety of monsters. These range from the usual suspects – Medusa, zombies, giant spiders – to more bizarre creations like Giant Cat, Giant Bull Man, Shrimp Attack, Hand Creature and the wonderfully-named Mad Javelin Man. During the game Mark can transform into Bert and use his fireball-shooting abilities, but that doesn't make Bert the best character to play, as Mark's bat can deflect enemy projectiles back, killing most with one hit. ■

FACT

A discovered prototype revealed that Monster Party was originally meant to be much darker and include many copyright-infringing bosses from the likes of *Planet of the Apes*, *Gremlins* and *Alien*.

MONSTER TRUCK RALLY

Year 1991
Publisher INTV Corp
Developer Realtime Associates

MATTEL'S INTELLIVISION WAS one of the earliest home consoles. When it started making a loss, Mattel's senior Vice President of Marketing bought the rights to the Intellivision name and formed INTV Corp. Monster Truck Rally, then, was essentially a game produced for a rival system. It's a spiritual successor to Stadium Mud Buggies – a 1989 Intellivision racing game that shared the same isometric viewpoint – and consists of eight events (including Hill Climb, Drag Race, Car Crush and Sled Pull) as well as a Monster Truck Rally mode where you take on all eight in a row. There's also a track builder mode where players can create their own courses or even generate a random one (procedurally generated tracks were a rare feature in racing games.) ■

FACT

The Intellivision brand has had numerous resurgences over the years. Various Intellivision compilation games have been released on modern systems, and an Intellivision Flashback plug-and-play console with 60 built-in games launched in 2014.

MOTOR CITY PATROL

Year 1992
Publisher Matchbox International
Developer Source R&D

THIS TOP-DOWN FREE-ROAMING driving game was published by Matchbox and tied in with its die-cast toy cars. You play as a police officer driving around five districts, trying to apprehend three types of criminal. Speeders can be arrested by driving near them with your siren on, while robbers (who drive red vans) and 'public enemies' (driving blue sports cars) can only be caught if you block their path until they surrender. Players can bring up a city map with the Select button at any time to find their bearings. The overhead viewpoint and handling make Motor City Patrol feel like a very early version of the original Grand Theft Auto, although obviously the fact you're playing as a cop instead of a criminal means the similarities end there. ■

FACT

Other Matchbox video games over the years include Emergency Patrol and Caterpillar Construction Zone. Both were released on both the Game Boy Color and PC.

MR. GIMMICK

Year 1993
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft

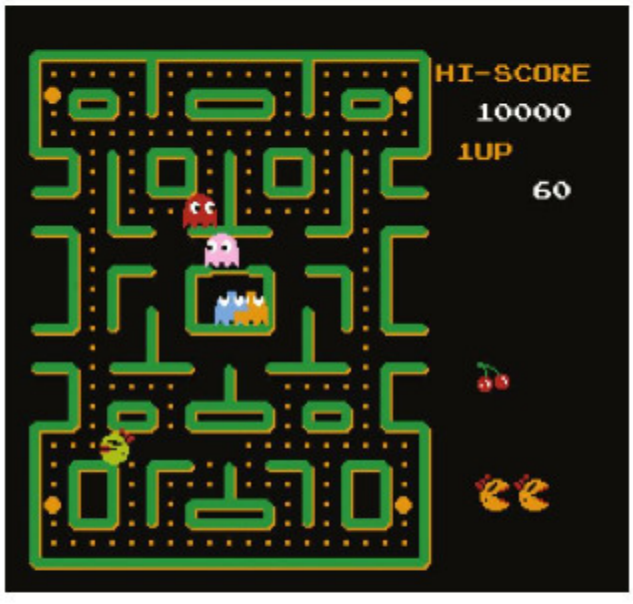
BY THE END of the NES's life, Sunsoft – who had been releasing high quality platformers throughout – had more or less mastered the hardware. A key example of this is one of its last NES games, Mr. Gimmick, which was sadly only released in Japan and Scandinavia. Easily one of the most visually impressive NES games, Mr. Gimmick tells the story of a little green blob who enters another dimension to rescue a young girl from her toys, who have kidnapped her as punishment for feeling unloved. The hero can spawn stars from the horn on his head: these can be thrown at enemies but (if you're really good) you can also jump off them as they bounce around, reaching higher platforms. ■

FACT

An American version of Mr. Gimmick was almost ready for release. US magazine *EGM* had already reviewed it, but Sunsoft decided at the 11th hour that it was too quirky.

MS. PAC-MAN

Year 1993
Publisher Namco
Developer Now Production



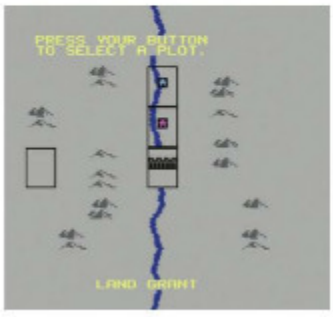
ARGUABLY THE FIRST ever game to feature a female protagonist, Ms. Pac-Man actually received two different NES games. The first was an unlicensed version, released in 1990 by Tengen without Nintendo's seal of approval. Then, in 1993, Namco decided to release its own legit version, seal and all. We'll get to the Tengen version later in the book, but for now let's look at the Namco one. Despite being released three years later, Namco's take is a tamer affair than Tengen's, featuring a more or less straightforward port of the 1982 arcade game. Playing as Pac-Man's love interest, players have the same task they did in the original game: clear each maze of dots while dodging the four ghosts Inky, Binky, Pinky and Sue (the orange ghost is no longer called Clyde, because hey, enemies need female representation too). While the gameplay is extremely close to that of Pac-Man, most fans of the series generally tend to agree that Ms. Pac-Man is the better of the two games because it has four different maze types instead of just one. It's also believed to be a more challenging game: whereas all the ghosts in Pac-Man have strict behavioural rules, making it possible for a player to learn a pattern to follow to finish each stage, in Ms. Pac-Man there's an element of random behaviour here to ensure players need to stay alert. The bonus fruit also bounces around the stage now, instead of sitting motionless in the middle of the screen. ■

FACT

Ms. Pac-Man actually started off as an unofficial bootleg. Namco had given Midway the rights to publish Pac-Man in the arcades, and a group of programmers presented a hacked and improved version called Crazy Otto to Midway. Midway rebranded it Ms. Pac-Man, which it's alleged happened without Namco's blessing.

M.U.L.E.

Year 1990
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Eastridge Technology



M.U.L.E. STANDS FOR Multiple Use Labour Element. By sheer coincidence they look like robotic mules, and they're the key tool in this unique resource development game. Four players (non-humans are CPU-controlled) decide to colonise a new planet, each working on their own area of land. The aim is to use your M.U.L.E.s to harvest elements including energy, food and smithore, and sell what you don't need to the planet's store to try and be the wealthiest on the planet. What makes M.U.L.E. unique is that while players are competing to be the best, they also have to work together to keep the colony alive: if your opponents become poor, they won't be able to buy the resources you're producing. ■

FACT

Usually you get video game versions of board games, but this time the opposite is true: a physical board game version of M.U.L.E. was launched in 2015.

MUPPET ADVENTURE: CHAOS AT THE CARNIVAL

Year 1990
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer Mind's Eye

MISS PIGGY HAS been 'pignapped' by the the awful Dr Grump, who's taken her to his secret carnival hideout. A group of Muppets, led by Kermit, head out to rescue her. Muppet Adventure is a collection of five mini-games: the first four can be selected in any order. These consist of a river ride with Kermit rowing downstream in a rubber ring, a bumper car obstacle course where the driver is Animal, a side-on space adventure where Gonzo pilots a small pod through an asteroid field and a Pac-Man style maze game where Fozzie has to collect presents. Once all four mini-games are completed players unlock the final one, where Kermit fights his way through a cave armed only with a feather for some reason. ■

FACT

In true Miss Piggy style, the game ends with her saying: 'Oh thank you! Oh thank you! But it sure took you long enough!'

M.U.S.C.L.E.

Year 1986
Publisher Bandai
Developer Tose

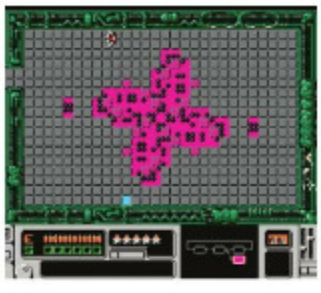
M.U.S.C.L.E. IS BASED on a Japanese manga and anime wrestling series called *Kinnikuman*. It's about a clumsy superhero who realises he's a missing prince, but to prove himself he has to enter wrestling competitions. This NES tie-in lets players fight not only as Kinnikuman (renamed Muscle Man for the English language release) but also a variety of other wrestlers with suitably rubbish names, including Robin Mask, Wars Man, Geronimo and Terry Man. Each bout is a tag team match, and each is the best of three falls. There are also special types of ring that can affect gameplay: the Ice Ring makes fighters slip around, while the Electrified Ring shocks anyone who touches the ropes. Wouldn't get that in WWE. ■

FACT

This isn't the only game based on M.U.S.C.L.E. Years later the anime evolved into Ultimate Muscle, which got a GameCube spin-off by the developers of WWF No Mercy.

THE MUTANT VIRUS: CRISIS IN A COMPUTER WORLD

Year 1992
Publisher ASC Games
Developer Rocket Science Productions



A COMPUTER VIRUS has been inserted into the CPI Complex – the world's artificial intelligence system – which could potentially affect all technology and threaten the lives of billions of people. Step forward the curiously named Ron W. Trainer, a master debugger who's chosen to rid the AI of this viral menace. Inside his microscopic spaceship, Ron must fly around inside the AI and destroy the virus using an anti-viral gun. The virus appears as a blob of green squares: as you shoot them with your gun they turn light blue and become 'clean' cells. The aim is to make your way through every sector of the AI, cleaning up the virus as you go along and making sure you cut off its ability to reproduce. ■

FACT

The ending teases a sequel, showing the evil mastermind behind the attack merging with the virus and promising to come back stronger than ever. Of course, he didn't.

MYSTERY QUEST

Year 1989
Publisher Taxan
Developer Carry Lab

HAO IS A young apprentice who's been trying to master the secrets of magic. Now the time has come for him to prove himself, so the Great Wizard sends him on a quest: journey to the four Mystery Castles to find the four magic talismans of wealth, wisdom, happiness and peace. Oh, and kill all the woodland creatures that approach you along the way (it seems the talisman of peace doesn't count for gophers and porcupines). Hao can fire magic at his enemies (complete with suspiciously Mario-esque fireball noise) and collect a number of different items along the way. The Power Helmet, for example, lets him break blocks by jumping into them, while the SOS Raft lets you survive a single fall into water. ■

FACT

When you beat the game you're told you're 'not good enough for wizard'. You have to beat it four times in a row before you get the badly-written good ending: 'Congratulation: you have over come your greatest challenge. Now you are powerful wizard.'

NARC

Year 1990
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Rare

THE FIRST EVER anti-drugs video game according to Acclaim, NARC is a side-scrolling arcade style game where players control Max Force and (in two-player mode) Hitman, two covert agents who have been given 'machine gun ammo and all the rocket bombs they can carry' and have free reign to kill as many drug dealers, pushers and gangsters as they can. Despite the obvious moral questions of gunning down countless criminals without trial, Acclaim was adamant that the game had a positive message, teaming up with anti-drug organisation Just Say No. 'Playing NARC is one way to express a stand against drugs,' reads a letter to gamers by Acclaim chairman Greg Fischbach, included in the game's manual. 'The real test, however, is your actions.' ■

FACT

A modernised version of NARC was released in 2005 for the PS2, Xbox and PC. Going completely against the original's message, players could confiscate the drugs being peddled, then take them to improve their stats.

NES OPEN TOURNAMENT GOLF

Year 1991
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D2

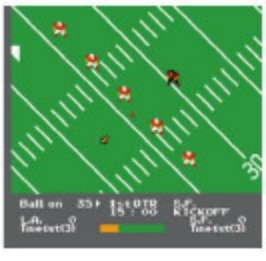
WHILE NINTENDO'S FIRST attempt at a golf game (1986's Golf) featured a player that looked suspiciously like Mario, there's no need for guesswork the second time around. In NES Open the main man is front and centre, and is the playable character in all single-player modes with Player two controlling Luigi. Your caddy is Princess Toadstool – or Daisy if you're playing as Luigi – and she'll give you occasional advice. There are three 18-hole courses to choose from (USA, UK and Japan), and a Match Play mode where you have five progressively harder opponents to take on: Luigi is the the first you'll encounter, while the other four are characters unique to this game. The Japanese version, Mario Open Golf, features twice as many courses. ■

FACT

On the game's cover and title screen, Mario is wearing a rather fetching stars and stripes golf outfit based on the US flag. This is an unlockable costume in Super Mario Odyssey on Nintendo Switch.

NES PLAY ACTION FOOTBALL

Year 1990
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Tose



THE SECOND AMERICAN football game published by Nintendo itself (the first being 10-Yard Fight), NES Play Action Football was one of the big titles pushed by Nintendo as offering support for its Four Score multiplayer adapter. It includes eight teams – LA, San Francisco, Miami, Chicago, Denver, Washington, New York and Houston – and while they donn't have official logos, the game's NFLPA licence means player names are accurate. You want Joe Montana playing for San Fran? Done. The big selling point was that four-player mode, though: it enables two-on-two games, with responsibilities divvied up between each pairing. One player handles play selection, punts, substitutions and quarterback control, while the other handles field goals, PATs, and controls running backs and receivers. ■

FACT

When a game finishes, a young lad at a sports news desk shows up to summarise how it went. This is Nester, the mascot of the official *Nintendo Power* magazine, which covered NES Play Action Football extensively.

NEW GHOSTBUSTERS II

Year 1990
Publisher HAL Laboratory
Developer HAL Laboratory

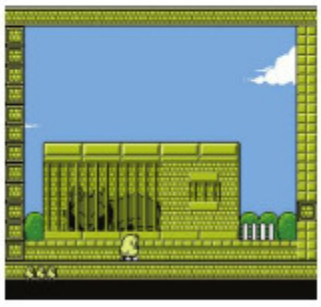
ACTIVISION'S GHOSTBUSTERS II game wasn't the most well-received tie-in ever, due to its extreme difficulty and poor graphics. European NES owners, however, were lucky enough to get a second Ghostbusters II game, and this one was significantly better. Developed by HAL, it's a top-down action game with rounder, cuter versions of the Ghostbusters. Players choose two characters from Ray, Egon, Winston, Venkman and even Tully (Rick Moranis' character), and your selected pair then has to clear various levels of ghosts. One 'buster is armed with their Proton Pack zapper to stun ghosts, the other activates the ghost trap to catch them. While the second character is usually CPU-controlled, there's a two-player co-op mode too. Missing out, American gamers? Get the Game Boy Ghostbusters II: it's based on this. ■

FACT

In 2011 a prototype for a North American version of New Ghostbusters II was discovered, showing that it was at least planned for release in that region at one point.

THE NEW ZEALAND STORY

Year 1991
Publisher Taito / Ocean
Developer Software Creations



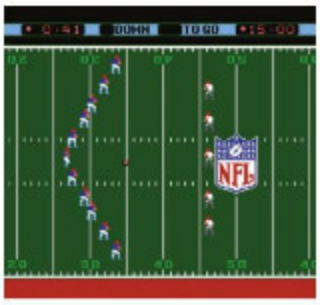
BEFORE EVERYONE STARTED associating New Zealand with the *Lord of the Rings* movies, the beautifully scenic country was linked with various other good things: its All Blacks rugby team, its indigenous Maori culture and The New Zealand Story, a brilliantly colourful platformer based on kiwis that was… um, developed in Japan (don't tell anyone). Playing as a little kiwi called Tiki, you have to save your girlfriend Phee Phee and all your friends from the nasty Wally Walrus. Players start off with a dinky bow and arrow, but over time Tiki can find new weapons like bombs and laser guns. If you're looking for it in North America, it goes by the slightly less subtle name of Kiwi Kraze: A Bird-Brained Adventure there. ■

FACT

A port of The New Zealand Story was released on the DS in 2007. It's a bit easier than the original, what with the ability to take multiple hits and the top screen showing a map of the level.

NFL

Year 1989
Publisher LJN
Developer Atlus



AFTER DOING WELL with their Major League Baseball game in 1988, the following year LJN and Atlus decided to repeat the trick with American football, offering the first ever NES game (and the first game in general for a decade) to feature the official NFL licence. This meant all 28 teams – from the now-defunct Houston Oilers to the Cleveland Browns – had their real team names and logos. Unfortunately, LJN's attempt to repeat what it had done with MLB meant it suffered the same setbacks too: much like the MLB game was missing the MLBPA players' licence, so too is NFL missing the NFLPA licence. This means real team names, logos and uniforms, but no player names: just their numbers and positions. ■

FACT

Just like the MLB game, NFL was preceded by a licensed Intellivision game. NFL Football had the official licence but, like the NES game, also had no player names.

NIGEL MANSELL'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RACING

Year 1993
Publisher GameTek / Gremlin
Developer Gremlin Graphics

THIS FORMULA ONE game backed by British 1992 F1 champion Nigel Mansell may not have been the most widely-praised racer, but as an NES game it looked remarkably polished thanks to its first-person viewpoint, something that was relatively rare for the 8-bit console. Players can take part in a single racer or an entire season. There are some rudimentary tuning options in there too: as well as being able to switch from automatic to manual transmission like in most racing games, you can also switch between hard, soft and wet tires, and adjust the angle of your wing. Mansell isn't the only licensed driver: the entire racer line-up consists of real world drivers, from Gerhard Berger to Jean Alesi to Michael Schumacher. ■

FACT

The SNES version of Nigel Mansell's World Championship Racing was promoted in the UK with a series of comedy TV ads starring the late comedian Rik Mayall pretending to be Mansell.

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

Year 1990
Publisher LJN
Developer Rare

BY THE TIME the '90s arrived, the *Nightmare on Elm Street* film franchise consisted of five movies, with main antagonist Freddy Krueger evolving from a terrifying child murderer to a wise-cracking, entertaining… um, child murderer. Despite the adult nature of the films, the fact that Freddy was now a pop culture icon (he even starred in an MTV special introducing music videos) meant an NES game was a no-brainer. Players control up to four teens – there's 1–4-player co-op, which is rare for a platformer – as they visit various locations in Elm Street to try and collect Freddy's bones, so they can burn them in a furnace. Along the way you need to fight off skeletons, demons, bats, wolves and zombies, none of which have anything to do with *Nightmare on Elm Street* but there you go.

There are at least some film-inspired elements: for example, you have a sleep meter which slowly depletes. When it runs out you fall asleep and end up in the dream world, which has much stronger enemies. The only way to get out is find a boombox and wake yourself up with loud music. Taking a cue from the third movie *Dream Warriors*, you can also give yourself special abilities while you're asleep, letting you play as a ninja, acrobat (complete with javelins) or wizard. At the end of each stage you'll do battle with Freddy in one of his forms, be it a giant glove that lunges at you, a huge Freddy snake head that spits smaller snakes, or simply the man himself. ■

FACT

The original prototype version of A Nightmare on Elm Street was very different. An early ad in Nintendo Power magazine promised that the player would actually be Freddy, trying to kill the teens trying to scatter his bones.

NIGHTSHADE

Year 1992
Publisher Ultra Games
Developer Beam Software

NIGHTSHADE IS AN interesting cross between a point-and-click adventure and a side-scrolling beat 'em up. It stars Mark Gray, an encyclopedia researcher who's a bookish history nerd by day, but trench coat and fedora wearing crime fighter at night. As his alter-ego Nightshade, players have to avenge the death of the city's previous superhero Vortex by tracking down an Egyptian villain named Sutekh and ruining his plans to merge all the gangs into a big crime syndicate.

While most of the game consists of point-and-click style exploration sections, there are occasional lengthy fights against various villains. There's also a 'popularity meter' which goes up the better you perform, in turn giving you access to new areas. The end credits thank two developers for their 'poor quality jokes'. ■

FACT

Nightshade was supposed to be the first in a series of games. The title screen gives the game's full name as Nightshade Part 1: The Claws of Sutekh.

NINJA CRUSADERS

Year 1990
Publisher Sammy
Developer NMK

DON'T YOU JUST hate it when aliens attack Earth? According to the NES library, it happened about once every fortnight during the '80s and '90s. This time the heroes drawing the short straw to face the new batch of invaders are Talon and Blade, a pair of ninjas. They have to make their way through 10 side-scrolling action platformer stages (you can play either solo or in two-player co-op), using their throwing stars, chain and sickle, bo staff and katana sword to bash their way through any alien foes silly enough to get in the way. The duo can also transform into a different animal – a tiger, hawk, dragon or armoured scorpion – depending on the weapon they currently have equipped. ■

FACT

Ninjas don't like being in the public eye too much, it goes against their principles. That's why, when you beat the game, you're told that 'the ninja returned to their homeland and back into the shadows of mystery'.

NINJA GAIDEN

Year 1989
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo

WHEN YOU THINK of ninja video games, the Ninja Gaiden series is usually one of the first that springs to mind (unless you're a Sega fan who's all about Shinobi). A well-loved franchise that's been running off-and-on for the past three decades, Tecmo's adventures of Ryu Hayabusa originally kicked off with an arcade game in 1988 followed mere months later by this separate NES title. Its mysterious and elaborate plot begins with Ryu receiving a letter from his late father, telling him to take the secret Dragon Sword and head to America. There he learns that someone named 'the Jaquio' plans to combine two mystical statues to resurrect an evil demon named Jashin to destroy the world. Time for action!

Ninja Gaiden is notorious for its difficulty, but whereas other NES games are remembered negatively for being similarly hard, Gaiden is instead respected for it. This is partly because the game still manages to be great fun:

a life meter prevents cheap one-hit deaths from frustrating the player, its cut scenes are well-animated and the ability to pull off springy wall jumps and run at high speeds gives everything a satisfyingly 'nimble ninja' feeling.

In Europe the game was renamed Shadow Warrior. Movie and TV censorship in the UK in particular was in a sensitive state in the late '80s following the 'video nasties' horror VHS controversy, so most references to things like nunchucks and ninjas were removed for a while: most notably resulting in the renamed *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles*. ■

FACT

If Ryu Hayabusa is a familiar name to you but you've never played a Ninja Gaiden game before, it may be because he's also a playable character in another popular Tecmo franchise, the fighting series Dead or Alive.

NINJA GAIDEN II: THE DARK SWORD OF CHAOS

Year 1990
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo

A YEAR AFTER the events of the first Ninja Gaiden, with the Jaquio well and truly defeated, a new threat has emerged. An emperor called Ashtar has decided he fancies taking over the world by getting his hands on the Dark Sword of Chaos, an evil blade which can engulf the planet in darkness. The US Army(!) gets in touch with Ryu and asks him to save the day, so off he goes. Ninja Gaiden II plays similarly to its predecessor, with a couple of new moves included. Before, Ryu could do wall jumps, whereas now he can climb walls too. He can now also attack enemies while climbing walls and ladders, but only by using one of the limited 'power boosting items' he's collected (like throwing stars or fire wheels). ■

FACT

By the time Ninja Gaiden II was released in Europe all the furore about ninjas in the UK had died down, so it was renamed Shadow Warriors II: Ninja Gaiden.

NINJA GAIDEN III: THE ANCIENT SHIP OF DOOM

Year 1991
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo

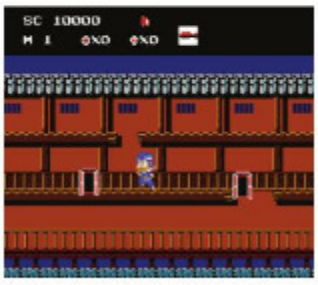
JUST IN CASE you were wondering what was going on in the year between the events of the first two Ninja Gaiden games, this third game fills in the blanks by providing a new adventure that fits neatly in the middle as both a sequel to Ninja Gaiden and a prequel to Ninja Gaiden II. This time Ryu, framed for a murder he didn't commit, learns of a CIA plan to create a race of super mutants by taking them from another dimension. This slightly shark-jumping plot is an excuse for players to enjoy yet another dose of brilliant Ninja Gaiden gameplay, this time with another new move: now Ryu can grab any overhead pipe or jungle ivy he sees and hang from it. ■

FACT

Tecmo released Ninja Gaiden Trilogy on the SNES in 1994. It bundled the three NES games on one cartridge: while the games themselves didn't look any better, the cut scenes were redrawn and a password system was added.

NINJA KID

Year 1986
Publisher Bandai
Developer Tose



THIS ACTION PLATFORMER was originally based on a manga and anime series called *GeGeGe no Kitaro* (also known as *Kitaro of the Graveyard*). Since North Americans had no idea what that was, both the game and protagonist's name were changed to the more west-friendly Ninja Kid. According to the manual's bizarrely written intro Ninja Kid is 'the junior defender of human rights' and it's up to him to battle the monsters of Demon Island, who are 'would-be conquerors of the free world'. He does this by taking on a randomised series of side-scrolling, vertically-scrolling and shoot 'em up missions with a variety of tasks. These could include killing a certain number of demons, or guiding a flame that's following you around into the path of candles to light them. ■

FACT

The *GeGeGe no Kitaro* manga started in 1960 and has enjoyed a number of different anime series over the years, with the most recent starting in 2018.

NINTENDO CAMPUS CHALLENGE

Year 1991
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo

ALTHOUGH NOT AN officially released game, the Nintendo Campus Challenge was developed by Nintendo and playable on normal NES systems, so it's in this book. The Campus Challenge was a tournament held in 1991 across around 60 college campuses in the US and Canada. The player was given 6 minutes and 21 seconds to complete three challenges: collect 25 coins in Super Mario Bros. 3, get 100,000 points in Pin*Bot, then spend their remaining time racking up the highest score possible in Dr. Mario. The winner from each campus was sent to Walt Disney World to play the final, with a car and $2500 scholarship up for grabs. Only one Campus Challenge cart is known to exist: it last sold in 2009 for $20,100. ■

FACT

There was a second Campus Challenge in 1992, this time consisting of three SNES games: Super Mario World, F-Zero and Pilotwings.

NINTENDO WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Year 1990
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo

THE NINTENDO WORLD Championships were held the year before the Campus Challenge, and consisted of 29 city championships across the United States. This cartridge offered a different 6:21 challenge: get 50 coins in Super Mario Bros., complete course 1 in Rad Racer as quickly as possible, then use the remaining time to rack up points in Tetris. The winner in each age category (11 and under, 12–17, 18+) won a convertible, a 40" TV, a gold Mario trophy and a $10,000 savings bond. Ironically, that $10K wouldn't be able to pay for the cartridge now: grey carts (of which there are 90) have sold for up to $20,000, while gold ones (of which 26 exist) have gone for as much as $29,400. ■

FACT

NES Remix 2 on the Wii U includes a Nintendo World Championships Remix mode. It offers a similar challenge using Super Mario Bros., Super Mario Bros. 3 and Dr. Mario, and has an online leaderboard.

NINTENDO WORLD CUP

Year 1990
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Technos Japan

ANYONE FAMILIAR WITH games like River City Ransom will already be able to spot that Nintendo World Cup has a very similar character design. Sure enough, this was originally released in Japan as the fourth game in Technos' Kunio-kun series (River City Ransom being the third). The western port replaces its high school teams with 13 international squads looking to win the World Cup. It's a more arcade-like take on football, with six-a-side teams and no offsides or fouls. Players can press A and B together to pull off a 'super kick': a massive shot or overhead kick that blasts through opponents and is almost impossible to save. You can only perform five of these in each half. It also supports both official four-player adapters. ■

FACT

Despite being called Nintendo World Cup in the west, Nintendo only published the game. Indeed, in Japan it was also released on the Mega Drive and PC Engine (TurboGrafx-16).

NOAH'S ARK

Year 1992
Publisher Konami
Developer Source R&D

NOT TO BE confused with Super Noah's Ark 3D on the SNES, Noah's Ark is a Konami platformer that wasn't released in North America but did make it to Europe. The flood is on its way, so Noah has to travel from continent to continent collecting all the different animals. Oddly, each world starts with a cutscene showing a pair of animals, but one is killed and the other is imprisoned. Noah has to save the trapped animal: so much for rescuing them in pairs. The main gimmick is the constantly rising water level: the longer you take to complete a level the more the water rises, until you drain it by defeating the giant plughole monster at the end of the stage (which I believe was in *Leviticus*). ■

FACT

Former religious game developer Wisdom Tree was recently resurrected and finally released a North American NES version of Noah's Ark via Kickstarter, after getting the rights from Source.

NOBUNAGA'S AMBITION

Year 1989
Publisher Koei
Developer Koei

OF ALL KOEI'S historical simulation games, Nobunaga's Ambition is regularly cited as one of the best of its era. Set during the Sengoku period of Japan (around 1467–1603), it's a strategy game where players take on the role of Oda Nobunaga or a number of other daimyos (great Japanese feudal lords) with the aim being to unify Japan by taking control of every fief (estate of land). Up to eight players can take part across 17 fiefs, though a much longer game consisting of 50 fiefs is also possible. Players have nearly 20 different options available to them in each turn: these range from standard moving and resting of men to changing the tax rate and bribing peasants with gold. ■

FACT

This is actually the second game in the Nobunaga's Ambition series, as the first was only released in Japan.

NOBUNAGA'S AMBITION II

Year 1991
Publisher Koei
Developer Koei

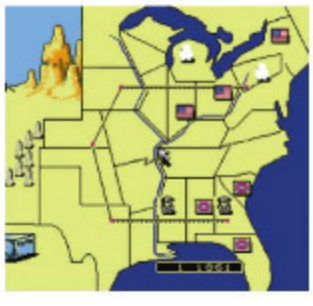
LOOK, IT'S PERFECTLY acceptable for someone to have two ambitions, you know. Once again, players get to play as Nobunaga or another daimyo as they try to unify Japan by using the territory they own as a starting point, and using their power to build on it. There are two distinct scenarios to choose from this time: Warlord Rivalry is set in 1560 and power is distributed fairly evenly, with no one daimyo owning more than four fiefs. The second scenario, meanwhile, is called Nobunaga's Ambition: it's set in 1582 and has the man himself starting with 20/38 fiefs already conquered, with most of the weaker daimyos already overtaken by stronger clans. There are 28 daimyos to choose from in the first scenario, and only 10 in the second. ■

FACT

The real life Oda Nobunaga may have helped unify Japan but he also had 23 children. His wife was unable to give birth so his two mistresses had his children instead.

NORTH & SOUTH

Year 1990
Publisher Kemco / Infogrames
Developer Kemco



THIS'LL GO DOWN well: North & South is a strategy game based on the American Civil War. Players choose to play as either the Union or the Confederacy and have to try to win the war through fair means or foul. The aim is to take your troops from state to state, occupying each one while attacking any pesky interfering enemies with your cannons, cavalry and infantry. Three possible 'disasters' can affect the game while you play: large storms that stop units from moving, European reinforcements to boost one team's troop count, and – most controversially – 'the Indians and Mexicans', who will attack armies in neighbouring stages and bomb Texas respectively. Despite the slightly non-PC nature of North & South, there's an entertaining strategy game here. ■

FACT

When starting a game you can choose which year it is from 1861–1864, with each side having different strengths and weaknesses depending on the year. You can't choose 1865 because 'the situation was too unfavourable for the South'.

OPERATION WOLF

Year 1989
Publisher Taito
Developer Taito

TERRORISTS IN A South American jungle have taken US Embassy officials prisoner. As a member of Operation Wolf, the most skilled personnel in the US Armed Forces, you have to parachute into terrorist territory and shoot your way through six areas: the terrorists' communication centre, the jungle, a nearby village, an ammo dump, a prison camp and the airport. Operation Wolf was a huge success in arcades – partly thanks to the big Uzi gun built into the cabinet – and was ported to a number of home systems. While the NES version isn't the most graphically impressive of these ports, the fact that it's only one of three home versions (along with the Sega Master System and ZX Spectrum) with light gun support means it's among the best. ■

FACT

Operation Wolf's popularity led to a number of sequels. The second game, Operation Thunderbolt, was ported to the SNES and was also compatible with its light gun, the Super Scope.

ORB-3D

Year 1990
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer The Software Toolworks

ORB-3D WAS HI-TECH Expressions' attempt at the '80s 3D craze and despite not looking like much here, it's actually good fun. It comes with a pair of GrenoVision glasses, which are similar to the usual red and blue specs most associate with 3D but instead have dark and light lenses. The game controls like a sort of single-player version of Pong, where you control bats on both sides of the screen. The 30 stages consist of hitting objects in the middle of the screen, but the twist is you can hold the A button to make your ball dip down to a lower plane. You also have a limited fuel supply, so every now and then you have to go to a gas station and swoop your ball through holes to top up. ■

FACT

Orb-3D is fairly common but second-hand copies don't always come with GrenoVision glasses. It also works with normal red-blue glasses if you put the blue lens over your right eye (and nothing over your left).

OTHELLO

Year 1988
Publisher Acclaim
Developer HAL Laboratory

THIS NES VERSION of the classic board game Othello (otherwise known as Reversi) was originally released in Japan in 1986 by an educational toy company called Kawada. A couple of years later, Acclaim brought it to the west. Given the board game's simple rules – players place light and dark pieces on the board in an attempt to flip over their opponent's pieces to dominate with their colour – it should be no surprise that the NES version is similarly straightforward. There's a two-player mode and a solo mode against the CPU here and that's all: no wacky, convoluted story mode or anything like that. This version of Othello was also ported to the Game Boy, but after this Kawada never published another video game. ■

FACT

Kawada published the Famicom Disk System version of Othello in October 1986, and the cartridge version in November 1986. This makes it the game with the shortest release transition from disk to cartridge.

OVER HORIZON

Year 1991
Publisher Takara
Developer Hot-B / Pixel

ONE OF JUST six NES games that was only released in the PAL-B region, Over Horizon is something of a hidden gem. It's a side-scrolling shooter with impressive graphics, but of greater interest is its extremely clever Edit mode. This lets you modify each of the game's weapons, giving you five points to distribute between three stats: homing (self-explanatory), bomb radius (shot size) and laser (shot power). This potentially results in a very different feel depending on how you set your weapons: do you want to have weak homing shots that let you focus on dodging enemy bullets, or shots that are much stronger but force you to focus on lining up your aim properly? If you can find this one, you'll enjoy it. ■

FACT

Over Horizon also gives players the ability to shoot both forwards and backwards, which is great for taking out enemies that have flown past you. A shoots forwards, B shoots backwards.

OVERLORD

Year 1993
Publisher Virgin Games
Developer Probe Software

BETTER KNOWN ON other formats in the UK as Supremacy: Your Will Be Done, Overlord is a strategy game designed by Dave Perry and Nick Bruty (Perry went on to work on classic 16-bit platformers like Earthworm Jim, Cool Spot and the Mega Drive version of Aladdin). It's a strategy game that has players building a series of colonies on different planets and trying to protect them from a CPU opponent, who is trying to do the same thing. You do this by slowly building up your military and improving your industries until you eventually have enough resources to destroy your enemy (using a nifty early example of a real-time combat system). The NES version is greatly simplified compared to the more complex computer versions. ■

FACT

Overlord's brilliant title theme was composed by Jeroen Tel, a Dutch composer whose work on Commodore 64 games is considered to be among the best on the system.

P.O.W. PRISONERS OF WAR

Year 1989
Publisher SNK
Developer SNK

ALTHOUGH SNK WAS better known for run-and-gun type games, it also produced a handful of high-quality beat 'em ups too. One of its earliest efforts was P.O.W., an arcade game that was then ported to the NES. You play as Bart, a captain of the army's Special Forces unit 'M'. Your mission is to deliberately get captured by GOON (the Government Of Offensive Network) then fight your way out of their P.O.W. camp: using your fists at first, then with other weapons you get your hands on: knives, machine guns, grenades, even brass knuckles. There are four levels: after breaking out of the camp, you then attack GOON's industrial area, escape through the jungle and eventually destroy its communication headquarters. ■

FACT

The second boss in the NES version is called Don James. This may be a reference to Nintendo of America's current executive VP of operations, who's been with the company for over 30 years.

PAC-MAN

Year 1988
Publisher Tengen
Developer Namco

WHEN TENGEN INITIALLY started releasing games for the NES, it went along with Nintendo's licensing rules. It released three 'official' NES games, complete with the Nintendo Seal of Approval on the box, and one of those games was Pac-Man (the others were Gauntlet and RBI Baseball). This is actually a port of Namco's 1984 Famicom version of Pac-Man, with a Tengen logo slapped on the title screen and not many other changes. It's a relatively solid rendition of the arcade original: the maze looks right, the ghosts behave like they should, Pac-Man moves at the correct speed and the comedy cut-scenes are present and accounted for. There are no extra bonus modes or stages like there are in Tengen's version of Ms. Pac-Man, though. ■

FACT

The maximum score you can get in Pac-Man is 3,333,360. You get it by eating every dot, every blue ghost and every fruit, without dying, until you reach the game's broken 'kill screen' at level 256.

PAC-MAN

Year 1993
Publisher Namco
Developer Namco

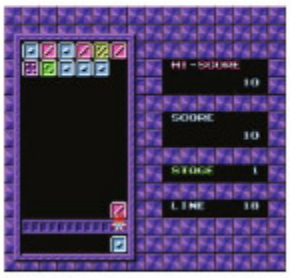
AFTER A WHILE, Tengen figured out how to bypass the cartridge copy protection on the NES, so it decided to ditch Nintendo's Seal of Approval process and re-release Pac-Man on unlicensed cartridges (see the Unlicensed Games section of this book). An official version wouldn't become available on the NES again for five whole years, at which point Namco decided to remove the Tengen logo on the title screen and re-release the same game again. Because Namco's version was released in late 1993 – by which point most American gamers had moved on to the SNES – the official Namco release is the least common NES version, but these days it's the easiest to play, since it's been on every Virtual Console service and the NES Classic Edition mini console. ■

FACT

Pac-Man creator Toru Iwatani once claimed his game was so popular with women because it was about eating, and women love eating. His words, not mine.

PALAMEDES

Year 1990
Publisher HOT-B
Developer Natsume



ACCORDING TO GREEK mythology, Palamedes was said to have invented a number of things, including counting, currency, weights and measures, jokes and dice. It's the latter of these creations that leads to this puzzle game being named after him, since it's all about matching dice together. Playing as a little chap called Dave on the bottom of the screen, you have to run from side-to-side, shooting dice at an ever-growing stack emerging from the top. Shoot a die with the same number as yours and both will disappear, plus the number will appear at the bottom of the screen. These numbers are gathered together to make up poker-style 'hands': the better your hand, the more extra lines you'll clear off the screen as a bonus. ■

FACT

Tournament mode has you playing against a series of CPU characters in head-to-head matches. These include fellow humans like Bobby, Jane and Stravinsky, to a squirrel called Nugget.

PANIC RESTAURANT

Year 1992
Publisher Taito
Developer EIM

A FUN LITTLE platformer from Taito and EIM (which brilliantly stands for Entertainment Imagination and Magnificence), Panic Restaurant is about a chef fighting anthropomorphic foodstuffs. Chef Cookie is the proud owner of the Eaten Restaurant, but that's about to change. The mad chef Ohdove has cursed the restaurant and now a gang of mutant food has taken over. It's up to Chef Cookie to use his frying pan, ladle, plates and eggs to take out the food and get his restaurant back. There are also a few mini-games, which include a slot machine, a fish-grabbing game and one where you have to catch eggs in a frying pan. If the name Ohdove confuses you, it's actually a mistranslation: it's supposed to be Hors D'Oeuvre. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of Panic Restaurant featured a younger-looking protagonist and instead of wielding a frying pan as his default weapon, he would headbutt enemies.

PAPERBOY

Year 1988
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Eastridge Technology

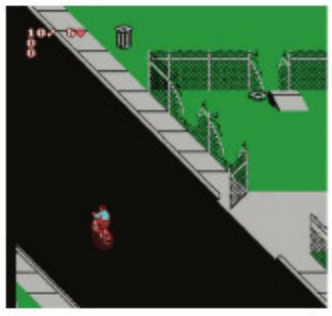
NOTABLE FOR BEING the first NES game developed entirely in the United States, Paperboy is rather fitting in that regard because it's about that vintage American tradition you've seen in a million old movies and TV shows: a young lad delivering papers by cycling through town and throwing them at houses. Of course, it's not as easy as Hollywood makes it look, as this NES version of Atari's arcade game shows. You have to accurately launch papers at either subscribers' front doors or (preferably) their mailboxes. Making matters more difficult is that the entire street is seemingly out to get you: breakdancers, skateboarders, workmen, dogs, lawn mowers, tornadoes and even the Grim Reaper are constantly getting in your way and trying to knock you off your bike. ■

FACT

Paperboy (along with many other classic arcade characters) has a blink-and-you'll-miss-him cameo in Disney's movie *Wreck-It Ralph*, during the busy Game Central Station scene.

PAPERBOY 2

Year 1992
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Tengen



PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS going to need their daily fix of news, so the Paperboy returned for a second helping on home systems (no arcade game this time). In a big step for equality, though, players can now choose to play as either a Paperboy or a Papergirl, with no difference in ability. The street now has two sides too: whereas in the first game you rode along one pavement and had to throw papers to the houses on the left-hand side, now the stage has you switching sides occasionally, meaning you'll need to learn how to aim to the right too. New house types include mansions, haunted houses and kids' club houses, while new enemies include gargoyles, ghosts and sewer monsters. ■

FACT

Both Paperboy games show a front page from the fictional *Daily Sun* newspaper between stages. In the Amiga version of the first game, the paper declares itself 'the world's most throwable newspaper'.

PARASOL STARS: RAINBOW ISLANDS II

Year 1991
Publisher Ocean
Developer Ocean

OR, AS THE title screen puts it, Parasol Stars: The Story of Bubble Bobble III (since Rainbow Islands was a sequel to Bubble Bobble). It's a more appropriate title because despite featuring the same human Bubby and Bobby characters as Rainbow Islands does, Parasol Stars plays a lot more like Bubble Bobble: each stage is a small enclosed space (though sometimes they scroll to the side now) and the aim is to defeat all the enemies before moving on to the next area. This time you're armed with a small umbrella: this can be used to scoop up enemies and throw them around the stage. You can also use it to gather drips that drop from the ceiling, and form them into large projectiles (often with elemental abilities). ■

FACT

Whereas Rainbow Islands was known for using the song *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, Parasol Stars instead uses Kaoma's song *Lambada* during boss battles.

PARODIUS

Year 1992
Publisher Palcom
Developer Konami

KEEN TO SHOW it's more than happy to poke fun at itself, Konami first released Parodius on the MSX home computer in Japan in 1988. This EU-only NES game is a port of the second game in the series initially released in arcades. It's a parody of Gradius (hence the name) and has players choosing between four different 'ships': the Vic Viper from Gradius, the cartoon ship from TwinBee, a flying octopus and Konami penguin mascot Pentarou. While most shoot 'em ups from the era took place in serious locations like space, Parodius instead has players flying through the likes of a pirate ship, circus, graveyard and casino. The NES version also has a new carnival level which isn't present in the original arcade release. ■

FACT

The Japanese subtitle for Gradius 3 was 'From Legend to Myth'. The Japanese subtitle for Parodius was 'From Myth to Laughter'.

PETER PAN AND THE PIRATES

Year 1991
Publisher THQ
Developer Equilibrium

EVERY PUBLISHER HAS to start somewhere, and before it was known as the studio behind the WWE, Saints Row and Red Faction games THQ started here. Based on the Fox Kids animated series of the same name, it follows Peter Pan as he tries to rid Neverland of Captain Hook and his gang of evil pirates. It's a relatively standard platformer with the added bonus that Peter can fly at any time if you press A + Up together. Although it takes place over nine stages, this number is a little misleading: levels 5, 6 and 8 are actually exactly the same as levels 1, 2 and 7 respectively, with the colours changed to make things look a little bit different. Cheeky stuff! ■

FACT

The Fox series lasted for 65 episodes from September 1990 to September 1991. Captain Hook was voiced by the legendary actor Tim Curry.

PHANTOM FIGHTER

Year 1990
Publisher FCI
Developer Marionette

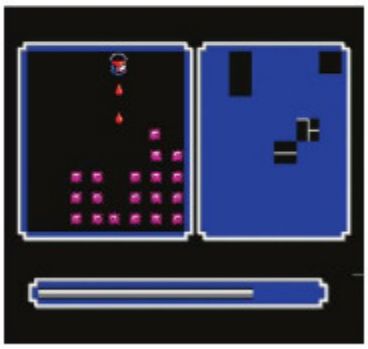
JIANGSHI ARE CHINESE vampires. They're often depicted in Chinese movies as stiff corpses that hop around with their arms outstretched, sort of like a zombie on a pogo stick. In Phantom Fighter, these 'wacky Chinese phantoms' (the manual's words, not mine) are on the loose and wreaking havoc in eight villages. You play as Kenchi, otherwise known as the Phantom Fighter, and it's your job to use the special skills you acquired from your kung fu master to defeat the Jiangshi. Phantom Fighter is a side-scrolling beat 'em up set on a single plane (unlike games like Double Dragon, where you can also walk up and down). This makes it feel a little more like a one-on-one fighting game where you simply move on after beating each opponent. ■

FACT

Another example of Jianshi is in Super Mario Land on the Game Boy, where they appear in World 4 as hopping enemies called Pionpi.

PICTIONARY

Year 1990
Publisher LJN
Developer Software Creations



HOW DO YOU play Pictionary – a game about guessing what people are drawing – when you're using an NES? Software Creations had a go at figuring it out. If you play in teams of two or more, you do indeed have to use the NES controller to crudely draw out an image while your teammates guess what it is. If playing solo or two-player, you instead play mini-games which result in parts of a pre-drawn picture are revealed. The better you do in the mini-game, the more of the picture you can see and the easier it is to guess. There's also an 'alternative' mode where players supply their own answers instead of the CPU, and you have to manually enter who got it right. ■

FACT

The drawing tools in Pictionary are oddly similar to a top-down racing game. You press A to move your cursor forward while drawing a line (or B to move forward without drawing), and press left and right to 'steer' it.

PIN BOT

Year 1990
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Rare

PIN BOT WAS an actual pinball machine released by Williams in 1986. Described at the time as 'the ultimate machine', the aim is to start at Pluto and travel through all the planets in the solar system. At the top of the table is a big robot head, and by filling the table's central grid of lights the robot's visor lifts, letting you shoot two balls into its eye sockets and triggering multiball. An NES version of Pin Bot was developed by Rare: while the NES's limitations meant it didn't look as impressive as the real thing, it was able to pull off tricks not possible on a real table, such as sending out planes that fire missiles at your flippers, temporarily destroying them. ■

FACT

Pin Bot was more recently recreated in The Pinball Arcade, a realistic compilation of pinball tables available on numerous systems including the Xbox One, PS4, Steam and mobile.

PINBALL

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D 1

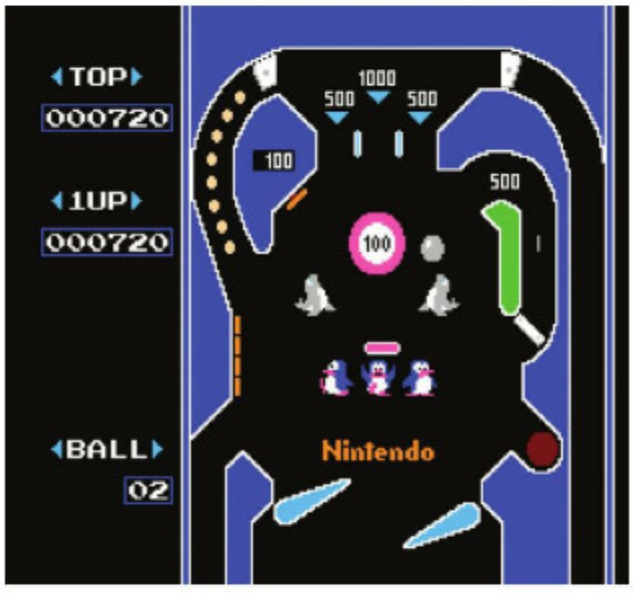
AFTER IMPRESSING NINTENDO with a prototype NES version of Joust (which wasn't released until years later), the late Satoru Iwata – still a freelance programmer – was asked to help the company with its latest title. As a result, Pinball has the distinction of the being the first ever published NES game programmed by the future Nintendo president (specifically, he was called in to fix the code after the original programmer ran into problems).

As a first attempt at a video game version of pinball, Nintendo's offering is a good one. Its vertical table is laid out over two screens, with the game switching between them depending on where the ball is. As it's a video game, the table in Pinball is able to include a lot of features real-life tables wouldn't be able to replicate.

These include a slot machine on the top half of the table, and three chicken eggs on the bottom half which activate stoppers if you can hatch all three at once.

FACT

Iwata's studio HAL Laboratory later released Revenge of the Gator, a Game Boy pinball game that felt like a spiritual successor to Pinball in many ways.



Most notable, though, is the ability to warp to a separate table by hitting the ball into a small hole on the right side of the table.

This takes you to a bonus area, more similar to games like Breakout, where you control Mario at the bottom of the screen. He's holding a big platform which you use to bounce the ball over a series of bingo numbers. Match up their colours and you'll help free Pauline (the girl from Donkey Kong) for bonus points. ■

PINBALL QUEST

Year 1990
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Tose

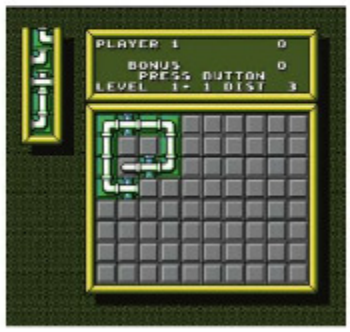
A CURIOUS MIX of genres, Pinball Quest's main mode is an RPG where the player has to rescue a princess who's been kidnapped and is being held captive in a castle. You have to travel upwards through six stages, but the twist is that your character is a ball and you proceed through the game with pinball flippers. It's basically the first ever RPG pinball game, so even though its skeleton-bashing and goblin-thwacking gameplay can be a little hit and miss at times, it certainly gets points for effort. If normal pinball is more your thing, there are also three standard tables included: the US diner themed Pop Pop, the gopher infested Viva! Golf, and Circus, a table with a slot machine. ■

FACT

Since this is an RPG, there is of course a store where you can buy items. Instead of weapons and magic, though, here you're buying new flippers and stoppers.

PIPE DREAM

Year 1990
Publisher Bullet-Proof Software
Developer Distinctive Software



KNOWN IN OTHER countries by its original name Pipe Mania, Pipe Dream is a popular puzzle game that started life on the Amiga and was ported to around 20 systems. Starting with one small section of pipe, you have to place a series of randomly chosen pipe sections on a grid in order to create a continuous pipeline. Just to make things a little more stressful, shortly after the stage begins, sewage (called 'flooz' here) starts to slowly flow through your pipeline. Each level has a target number: you have to make sure the flooz flows through at least that many pieces of pipe before it catches up and either flows out of the pipe, or is jammed into a wall and can't flow any further. ■

FACT

If you've never played Pipe Dream but the concept is familiar to you, it may be because Bioshock had a hacking mini-game with a very similar concept.

PIRATES!

Year 1991
Publisher Ultra Games
Developer Rare

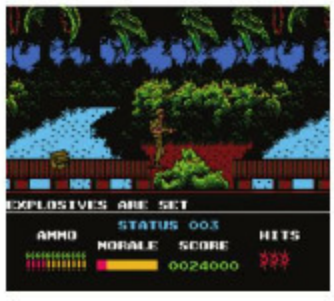
SID MEIER, THE man behind much-loved combat simulation games like F-15 Strike Eagle (and who would go on to make the Civilisation games), created this pirate sim designed to let players experience what it was like sailing the seven seas. It's an open world game where you're free to sail the Spanish Main doing whatever you please – attacking enemy ships, invading towns, looking for buried treasure or just acting as a peaceful trader – until you eventually retire and see what your total plunder was. There are six different time periods to choose from between 1560 and 1680, and you can choose to be either an English, French, Dutch or Spanish pirate. These influence the difficulty: for example, the English government supported pirates in the sixteenth century. ■

FACT

Because of Nintendo of America's family-friendly policy, you can't trade tobacco like you can in other versions. It's replaced by the more generic 'crops'.

PLATOON

Year 1988
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft



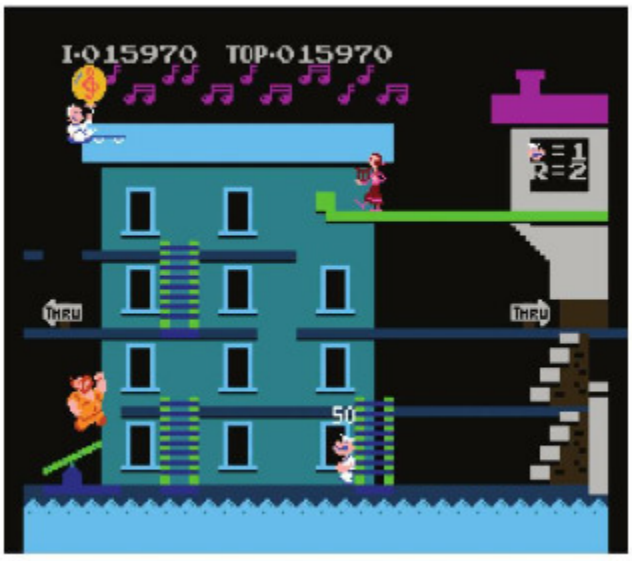
IT'S A STRANGE choice to take an anti-war film and turn it into a video game where you're given points for how many enemies you kill, but that's Platoon, the NES version of Oliver Stone's Vietnam masterpiece. It consists of four unique stages: it starts with a side-scrolling jungle maze where you're constantly attacked by enemies, followed by a first-person section where you explore an underground tunnel system. Stage 3 is a first-person light gun shooter style section where you have to survive the night in your bunker by lighting flares to see and shoot enemies, while the final stage – referred to in the manual as the '3D Jungle' – is a third-person section where you have four minutes to find Sergeant Barnes' foxhole and defeat him by tossing five grenades into it. ■

FACT

Unlike the movie, the game ends on a happy note with Charlie Sheen's character saluting and flying off in a helicopter, conveniently missing out the section where he looks down and weeps as he sees a crater full of corpses.

POPEYE

Year	1986
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D1



WHEN DONKEY KONG was in its initial stages of development, it was supposed to be a Popeye game. Nintendo couldn't secure the licence quickly enough though, and so Popeye became Mario, Olive Oyl became Pauline and Brutus (or Bluto, if you prefer) became the titular gorilla. Eventually the licensing deal was finalised and Nintendo finally got its hands on the Popeye rights, so Shigeru Miyamoto and Genyo Takeda created a completely different game for the plucky sailor.

Popeye consists of three stages, each with Olive trapped at the top of the screen. Playing as Popeye, you have to run around the level catching the items falling from Olive: hearts in level 1, musical notes in level 2 and letters spelling out 'HELP' in level 3. Collect enough and you'll move on to the next stage, and if you beat the third level the game will loop and get tougher.

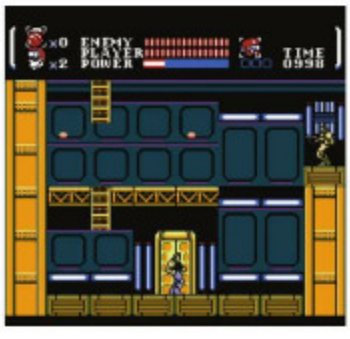
FACT

If you're wondering why Bluto is called Brutus here, he's had both names at various times over the years. It would take too long to explain here, but long story short: he's Bluto now, he was Brutus in this game.

Catching things falling from the sky wouldn't be much of a game if there were no hazards, of course, which is where Brutus comes into play. He's wandering around the stage too, and if he reaches Popeye he'll punch him into next week. The only way Popeye can get rid of Brutus for a while is by punching the can of spinach located somewhere on the stage. Do this and Popeye will power up, letting him knock Brutus out. The second loop round introduces a Sea Hag as a second enemy, to make things trickier. ■

POWER BLADE

Year	1991
Publisher	Taito
Developer	Natsume



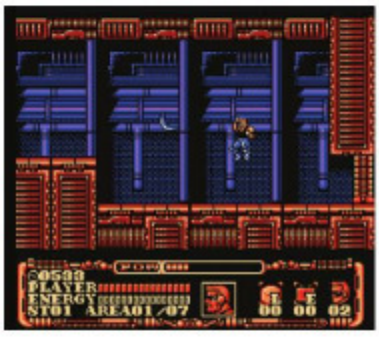
YET ANOTHER NES game set in the future (2191) about a Master Computer – one that controls the general running of the world and lets everyone live in paradise – being taken over. This time alien terrorists are the culprit, so it's up to the computer's chief security officer NOVA to fix things. Armed with his boomerang, NOVA has to enter the six different sectors (you can choose the order to play them, like in Mega Man), kill the enemies roaming around and get the ID cards from the agents trapped there. Once he has all six cards, NOVA can then enter the Master Computer Control Centre and try to save the day. Occasionally you'll find a metal suit: this lets you fire the titular Power Blade, which can cut through walls. ■

FACT

The game's box features a chap who looks very similar to Arnold Schwarzenegger. Arnie's lawyers contacted the artist, but he sent them photos of himself doing a similar pose and claimed those were the reference images he used. They backed down.

POWER BLADE 2

Year	1992
Publisher	Taito
Developer	Natsume



THE DELTA FOUNDATION has built a line of fighting cyborgs. Delta threatens the US government that if it won't buy the cyborgs, they'll sell them to an enemy nation instead. The President calls NOVA and asks him to destroy Delta and all its poxy robots. As in the first game, NOVA can choose which order he takes on each stage. Leaning even heavier on Mega Man, however, this time clearing each stage gives you a special suit, and you can switch between suits for special powers (swimming, flying, walking on walls and absorbing bullets). Of course, the Power Blade makes its return too, though once again it's a power-up you collect in each stage rather than a standard weapon (welcome back, trusty boomerangs). ■

FACT

The Delta Foundation definitely has nothing to do with Delta City, the area the OCP corporation wants to build and protect with cyborgs in the hit movie *Robocop*. Nothing at all.

POWER PUNCH II

Year 1992
Publisher American Softworks
Developer Beam Software

THE SUCCESS OF Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!! led to American Softworks and Beam Software working on a spiritual successor. It was going to star Tyson as the protagonist instead of the final boss, and would have him being sent to perform in an intergalactic tournament against a bunch of alien opponents (because nobody on Earth could beat him).

Tyson's real-life issues caused some problems, though, and it was presumably realised that having him in the game would be toxic. Mike Tyson was promptly replaced with Mark Tyler, and the game was released as Power Punch II (even though there was never a first one). Nintendo had nothing to do with the game, and it shows: its controls and fighting mechanics are nowhere near as solid as those in Punch-Out!!. ■

FACT

The prototype featuring Tyson, named Mike Tyson's Intergalactic Power Punch, was found in 2009. Its contents were made available for use on emulators, and reproduction carts were sold.

PREDATOR

Year 1989
Publisher Activision
Developer Pack-In Video

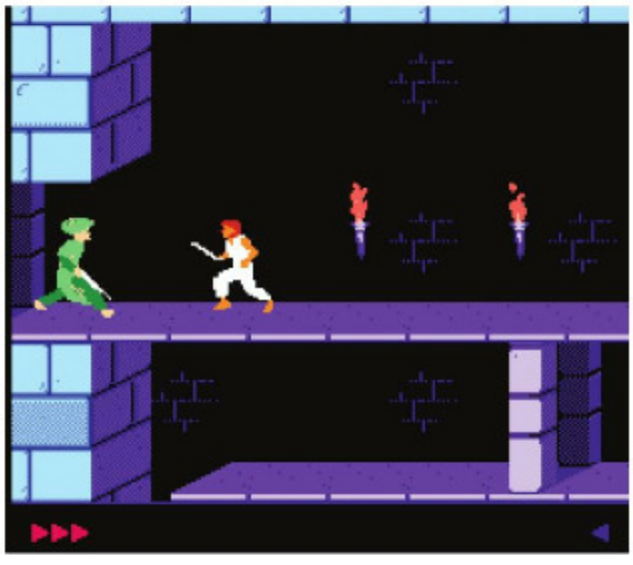
MAJOR DUTCH SCHAEFER (Arnold Schwarzenegger) is the sole survivor after a mysterious creature kills all his fellow soldiers. He has to make his way through every stage – there are 30 in the game but different paths mean you only play through 20 – trying to avoid and then eventually kill the Predator. This is an iffy Contra style game where you shoot your way through insurgents, scorpions and 'Predator's friends', which include odd little walking balls with wings. There are occasional auto-scrolling sections played out in Predator's thermal vision, and the final battle is against a giant floating Predator head, so it's not entirely canon. The game actually ends just before the Predator removes its mask: the rest is played out in cutscenes. ■

FACT

The cutscenes telling the story of the movie make some changes to clean things up a bit. The 'you're one ugly motherf*****' line from the film is replaced with 'you're one ugly beast'.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

Year 1992
Publisher Virgin Games
Developer MotiveTime



PRINCE OF PERSIA is one of those select few games that are important for creating significant milestones in the evolution of gaming. Here the revolutionary element was the character animation, which was widely praised at the time (this was long before the days of motion capture, after all).

The game's designer Jordan Mechner used a technique called rotoscoping – something he'd done in his previous game Karateka – to create the animations of the game's characters. Using home movies he'd shot of his brother performing various jumps and motions, Mechner extracted each frame of the footage and drew character sprites over his brother, creating fluid and lifelike animation in the process.

Thankfully, there was an interesting game to accompany the art style. The player controls a nameless hero who's being held prisoner in the dungeon of a Persian palace after the evil wizard Jaffar kidnaps the Sultan's daughter (who loves the protagonist). It's up to the hero to escape the dungeon, defeat Jaffar, rescue the Sultan's daughter and become the Prince of Persia.

Notorious for its punishing difficulty, Prince of Persia is also known for its unique time-based gameplay. Jaffar's set an ultimatum for the Sultan's daughter: if she doesn't agree to marry him in 60 minutes she'll be killed. This gives the player an hour in real time to make their way through each stage – dealing with sword-wielding guards, spike traps, crumbling bridges and even your own evil doppelganger – and reach the end of the game. ■

FACT

Prince of Persia was ported to more than 15 systems: while it played similarly on most, the SNES version was wildly different. It had enhanced graphics, loads of new levels and a 120-minute time limit to make up for this.

PRINCESS TOMATO IN THE SALAD KINGDOM

Year 1991
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

FOR A GAME featuring fruit and vegetables, Princess Tomato's plot is quite heavy. King Broccoli of the Salad Kingdom abolished segregation so every foodstuff could live in equality. The nasty Minister Pumpkin wasn't having any of this, so he decided to build a huge castle and declare pumpkins the greatest race. He then kidnapped the King's daughter, Princess Tomato, then the King died shortly afterwards. It's up to the noble Sir Cucumber and his sidekick – a baby persimmon called Percy – to seek justice. The game plays like an old-school text adventure, but instead of having to type in commands there are 14 of them to choose from at any time. Occasionally you'll have to take part in rock–paper–scissors battles, too. ■

FACT

Before its release on the NES, Princess Tomato was developed for a number of Japanese home computers. These featured completely different illustrations to the Nintendo version.

PRO SPORT HOCKEY

Year 1993
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Tose

IT MAY NOT have the official NHL licence, but Jaleco's NES ice hockey game crucially does have the NHLPA licence which lets it use real player names, even if the 24 teams aren't the real deal. This means that while the Pittsburgh team have a generic logo and aren't referred to as the Pittsburgh Penguins, you can still see Mario Lemieux and Jagr Jaromir's names in the roster. The main mode is the Super Cup (again, no official Stanley Cup here), in which the 24 teams are split into six groups. Over the course of a seven-game tournament, you have to try to make your way to the final and win the trophy. There's also a training mode where you can practice either offence or defence in one-on-one situations. ■

FACT

The SNES version of Pro Sport Hockey added a stamina mechanic, where payers got more tired as they played. You could turn this off, but at a price: because the goalies never got tired, it was impossible to score.

PRO WRESTLING

Year 1987
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D3

IT'S CLEAR THAT professional wrestling was a big deal in both Japan and North America when the NES launched, because by only 1987 there were already a few wrestling games on the system. Pro Wrestling was the third (after M.U.S.C.L.E. and Tag Team Wrestling) and was Nintendo's own take, rather than that of a third party. The game features seven wrestlers, from the 'invincible warrior' Fighter Hayabusa to the mysterious space traveller Starman and the frankly bizarre Amazon, who's 'half piranha, half man'. While its actual take on the world of sports entertainment is ultimately forgettable, Pro Wrestling is still well-known among retro gamers for its infamous declaration every time a match ends: 'A WINNER IS YOU'. ■

FACT

Pro Wrestling was created by Nintendo developer Masato Masuda. He eventually left Nintendo and went on to work on the excellent Fire Pro Wrestling series.

PUNCH-OUT!!

Year 1990
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D3

AFTER ITS LICENSING deal with Mike Tyson ran out, Nintendo wasn't allowed to make or sell any more Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!! cartridges. Rather than renew the licence – and it's a good job it didn't, given the controversy that was to follow him later – it got around this by ditching Iron Mike altogether and re-releasing the game as simply Punch-Out!!. The vast majority of the game is absolutely untouched from the initial release, except for the obvious removal of Mike Tyson as the final boss. Replacing him is Mr Dream, a smiling all-American meathead (think an 80's sprite-based John Cena) with some incredibly dangerous attacks. This version – although far less common than the Tyson one – is the one used whenever the game is re-released on Virtual Console. ■

FACT

In Japan, winners of Nintendo's Golf Famicom tournament won a special golden cartridge of Punch-Out!!. Since that was in 1987, many years before the Mr Dream version, the boss on that cartridge is another series veteran, Super Macho Man.

THE PUNISHER

Year 1990
Publisher LJN
Developer Beam Software

BASED ON THE Marvel Comics superhero, the Punisher is a rail shooter similar to the likes of Operation Wolf, but it differs in that you play it over the shoulder of the protagonist (instead of through his eyes, as in most games in the genre). The main benefit here is that, whereas in many other rail shooters an enemy will instantly cause damage if you don't shoot them quickly enough, here you can still move to the side and avoid their bullets. There are five bosses to shoot your way through – Jigsaw, Colonel Kliegg, Hitman, Sijo and Assassin – before you fight the main man, the Kingpin. These boss battles keep the same third-person viewpoint but switch to hand-to-hand combat instead. ■

FACT

The year before this game was released there was a straight-to-video movie based on *The Punisher*, starring Dolph Lundgren. It was about as good as it sounds.

PUSS 'N BOOTS: PERO'S GREAT ADVENTURE

Year 1990
Publisher Electro Brain
Developer Shouei System

MUCH-LOVED JAPANESE ANIME studio Toei Animation released an animated movie in 1969 based on the story of Puss 'n Boots. The main character, Pero, became the studio's mascot and features in its logo to this day. This game is based on the third Puss 'n Boots film, which was released in 1976. After refusing to kill a mouse, Pero is sent back in time by the evil Count Gruemon. It's up to Pero to defeat the Count and get back to his real time, while also avoiding assassins hired by the Cat Kingdom (because by helping a mouse he violated Cat Law). It's standard platforming fare here, taking place over 7 stages. Pero can also ride various vehicles including a car, ship, balloon, airplane and submarine. ■

FACT

Oddly, despite not being a very popular game, Puss 'n Boots featured in an episode of Nintendo cartoon series *Captain N: The Game Master*, complete with a redesigned Pero.

PUZZNIC

Year 1990
Publisher Taito
Developer Taito

A PUZZLE GAME, consisting of 160 levels, where the aim is to match blocks of the same colour. Each stage consists of a number of coloured blocks, and the player can slide them around by highlighting them, holding the A button and moving left or right. While this initially seems fairly straightforward, it gets complicated very quickly with the introduction of things like odd numbers of blocks (if you have three you can't only match two, because then you'll be left with a spare one), walls and elevators. By the end of the game you're dealing with hugely complicated levels with eight different types of block in various quantities, meaning it eventually becomes one of the hardest puzzle games on the NES. ■

FACT

Originally an arcade game, Puzznic was released on numerous systems including the Game Boy, C64, ZX Spectrum and Amiga. Beat a level in the Japanese arcade version and a naked woman is shown.

Q*BERT

Year 1989
Publisher Ultra Games
Developer Konami

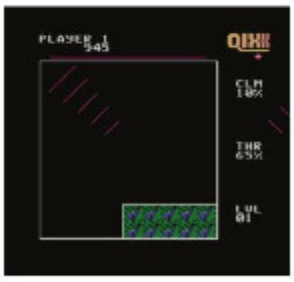
A PORT OF Gottlieb's iconic 1982 arcade game. Q*bert is a single-screen action game where the aim is to jump around a pyramid and land on every block. When you land on a block the colour changes: the level is complete when every block's been painted. Naturally, it's not as easy as that: not only was the isometric viewpoint a little off-putting for players for whom it was a new concept at the time, but Q*bert is also pursued by a bunch of enemies, ranging from the evil snake Coily to the sneaky Sam and Slick (who can change squares back to their original colour). Get hit by an enemy and you'll get to see Q*bert uttering his trademark string of (censored) obscenities. ■

FACT

Q*bert may be a strange name for a game, but it could have been even worse. While creators Warren Davis and Jeff Lee were coming up for titles, one potential 'solution' was the charming Snots and Boogers.

QIX

Year 1991
Publisher Taito
Developer Novotrade



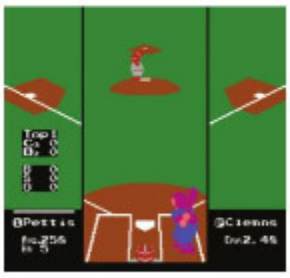
THE ULTIMATE PROOF that graphics don't make a game, Qix is easily one of the most basic-looking titles on the NES and yet enjoyed cult success. You play as a small marker that can either move along existing boundary lines or draw new ones. You have to claim as much of the screen as possible by drawing new boundaries: when you complete a fully closed-in area, it changes colour. The problem is, there are enemies roaming around – including the titular Qix, a big whirling collection of rods – and if these hit the boundary you're drawing before you close it off, you'll lose a life. This makes it the ultimate 'risk vs reward' game: bigger boundaries nab you more of the screen, but leave you open to attack for longer. ■

FACT

There have been numerous other games inspired by Qix, including Stix, Maniax, Volfied, Space Xonix and the questionable Gals Panic, where the areas you capture reveal images of scantily clad women.

R.B.I. BASEBALL

Year 1988
Publisher Tengen
Developer Namco



ANOTHER OF TENGEN'S three licensed NES games, along with Pac-Man and Gauntlet (before the studio figured out how to bypass Nintendo's copy protection and released its own unofficial carts). Similar to Jaleco's Pro Sport Hockey with its NHLPA licence, R.B.I. Baseball was the first baseball game to feature the MLBPA licence. This meant that while the team names and logos weren't authentic, the player names were. That said, the game does only have eight teams (plus two American and National all-star teams), so if you had your hopes set on playing as the Cleveland Indians or Toronto Blue Jays you're out of luck. It plays a solid game of baseball, with chunky cartoon players similar to those in Nintendo's launch game Baseball. ■

FACT

The R.B.I. series ended for a while with R.B.I. Baseball '95 for the Sega 32X. It was resurrected nearly two decades later with R.B.I. Baseball '14, and has enjoyed yearly updates since.

R.C. PRO-AM

Year 1988
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Rare

PERHAPS THE MOST well-loved of Rare's NES titles, R.C. Pro-Am is an isometric racing game in which the cars are all small radio-controlled ones. Merely racing won't always get you far, though: one of R.C. Pro-Am's main selling points is the introduction of weapons, something that was fairly new for racing games at the time.

Players can collect either rockets to fire straight ahead at opponent, or bombs to drop behind them: whichever they choose, hitting another competitor takes them out of the action for a while. There are other power-ups on the track too: roll cages give you invulnerability and let you plough through other cars, sending them spinning, while the turbo, engine and tyre pick-ups upgrade your car's acceleration, top speed and handling respectively when the race ends.

Arguably most important, however, are the bonus letters: there's one on each track, and when you collect eight – spelling out NINTENDO – you'll upgrade to a brand new car.

FACT

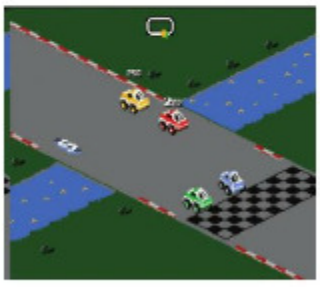
R.C. Pro-Am was chosen as one of the 30 Rare games to feature in Rare Replay for the Xbox One. Although the game was mostly untouched from its NES form, the NINTENDO letters were changed to CHAMPION to avoid awkwardness.

At first you'll be driving a truck, but you can upgrade to a four-wheeler and then an off-roader.

As if the missiles and bombs flying all over the place weren't dangerous enough, each track also features its own hazards. These range from puddles that slow you down to oil slicks that make you spin: hit the wall while spinning and you'll wreck your car. There are even pop-up barriers – which make you instantly crash – in later stages. A difficult game, then, but easily one of the finest racers on the NES and a clear influence on other weapons-based racers that followed. ■

R.C. PRO-AM II

Year 1992
Publisher Tradewest
Developer Rare



BUILDING ON THE success of the first R.C. Pro-Am, the eventual sequel added a bunch of new features. Rather than a strictly solo affair, R.C. Pro-Am II allows up to four players to race against each other. There's more variety in the track types, too: as well as eight normal tracks (as in the original game), there are now also eight city-based courses and eight offroad ones. There are now two bonus games – tug of war and drag race – and a bunch of new terrain types like rivers and snow to keep you on your toes. Well, on your wheels. Although it wasn't massively different from the first game, R.C. Pro-Am II did enough to appeal to fans who were looking for a little more. ■

FACT

One of the major complaints aimed at R.C. Pro-Am II is the addition of an aircraft that flies by and drops bombs on the track, slowing you down. These bombs are notoriously tricky to dodge.

RACE AMERICA

Year 1990
Publisher Absolute Entertainment / MB
Developer Imagineering

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY MB in Europe under the name Corvette ZR-1 Challenge, Race America has you racing from Boston to Los Angeles over nine legs. Before you start you can choose one of eight opponents to start off against, ranging from the very Italian and extremely stereotypical Mike Linguini to Frenchman Pierre Sedan, who has a habit of trying to block you from overtaking him. If you beat an opponent you'll race the next, stronger opponent in the next race, but the ability to choose your first one means you can potentially race all nine legs against A. J. Turbo, the best racer in the game, to make things extra tricky. In case you're wondering, the A. J . stands for 'Awesome Jock'. ■

FACT

While the US version of Race America has nondescript cars that look a little like Dodge Vipers, the European version featured officially licensed Chevrolet Corvettes.

RACKET ATTACK

Year 1988
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Tose

THE MOERO!! SERIES of sports games in Japan was ported to the west under a variety of different names. The first – Moero 1!! Pro Yakyuu – became Bases Loaded. Racket Attack was based on the second game, Moero 2!! Pro Tennis. It's a standard tennis game with a viewpoint that's generally lower and closer than most other tennis titles on the NES. Players can control one of eight men (with odd names like Brofsky, First, Horn and Gibbco) or eight women (with similarly bizarre monikers like Orchler and Jansco), and take part in seven-game tournaments in order to win a trophy. As in many tennis games, you can play on grass, clay or hard courts, with each affecting the height and speed the ball bounces. ■

FACT

The North American version of the game has banners advertising Jaleco and Wilson. The European version, however, removes the Wilson branding.

RACKETS & RIVALS

Year 1993
Publisher Palcom
Developer Konami

KONAMI MADE ITS fair share of memorable sports games for the NES – including Double Dribble and Blades of Steel – but Rackets & Rivals, its take on tennis, isn't really one of them (which may explain why it was only released in Europe and never made it to America or Japan). You have to play your way through four different tournaments: the 'Championship of the All European Highschools', 'Championship of the All European Universities', 'Sonasonic Championship' and 'Palcom Cup'. Each tournament consists of seven matches against increasingly better opponents, from the weak Clumsy, Bouncer and Netman to the elite Bughri, Smasher and Hansome. Its awkward controls coupled with the strangely echoed umpire sound samples, however, mean it's not as enjoyable as it could have been. ■

FACT

Despite being developed by Konami, Rackets & Rivals makes almost no reference at all to the company, instead only ever referring to its EU publishing arm Palcom.

RAD RACER

Year 1987
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Square

AFTER DIPPING ITS toe into the world of 3D with The 3-D Battles of WorldRunner, Square decided to plunge a whole foot in with Rad Racer. Inspired by other arcade style racers like Out Run, Rad Racer has players choosing to drive either a Ferrari 328 Twin Turbo or an F1 car through eight different tracks, ranging from the idyllic Sunset Coastline to the chilly Snow White Line, via the visually stunning night-time San Francisco Highway. It's the 3D that's the real star here, but it's not as impressive as it was in Japan: while the Famicom version supported the Famicom 3D System shutter glasses, western gamers had to make do with standard red/blue ones instead. Despite this, it was still one of the better racing games on the NES. ■

FACT

Rad Racer featured in the most (in)famous scene in the Nintendo-themed movie *The Wizard*, in which bad kid Lucas plays it with a Power Glove before turning to the protagonists and saying: 'I love the Power Glove. It's so bad.'

RAD RACER II

Year 1990
Publisher Square
Developer Square

RAD RACER WAS a relative success for Nintendo and Square, but its sequel is far lesser known among gamers. It wasn't a terrible game by any means – far from it – but it didn't quite offer much different. The 3D effect was dropped, and players had eight new areas to drive through, all set in the US (the Bay Area, the Big Apple, Las Vegas Boulevard, Gettysburg and the like). As in the previous game, the aim is to get through each stage's checkpoints before your time runs out: other cars aren't competing with you, but they do get in your way and so skilful navigation between them is a must if you don't want to crash and waste valuable seconds. ■

FACT

There are two music tracks to choose from, named Gum Ball Crash and Coast to Coast. There's also an option to play with the engine noise instead: brilliantly, this option is called Sing Yourself.

RAID ON BUNGELING BAY

Year 1987
Publisher Broderbund
Developer Hudson Soft

THE BUNGELING EMPIRE is developing a war machine in an attempt to take over the earth. You must sneak into Bungeling Bay in your helicopter and destroy the Empire's six secret factories. This was the first game developed by Will Wright – who went on to create SimCity and The Sims – and it's easy to see the early building blocks for the former taking place. The game map is large (100 screens in total) and the world is constantly evolving: the factories are working away, producing guns, planes, boats and radar dishes, so if you don't take them out quickly things will get harder for you. There's also a two-player game where Player 2 controls the Bungeling war machine and tries to take Player 1 out. ■

FACT

This is actually the third reference to Bungelings in a Broderbund game. Lode Runner's enemies were called Bungelings, whereas the Bungeling Empire is also the organisation who kidnapped the hostages you're freeing in Choplifter.

RAINBOW ISLANDS

Year 1988
Publisher Taito
Developer Taito

THE SEQUEL TO Bubble Bobble, Rainbow Islands takes place after the events of its predecessor. Dragons Bub and Bob – now in their human forms Bubby and Bobby – have to save the seven Rainbow Islands from the evil monster Krabo before they all sink into the sea. The main mechanic in this game is the ability to conjure up rainbows, which can be used for a few different purposes. As well as using them to hurt enemies on impact you can also walk on rainbows, using them as bridges to reach higher levels. Jumping on a rainbow will also cause it to collapse, damaging any enemies it hits as it falls. Although Taito also made the arcade version, this NES port has completely different stages. ■

FACT

The Famicom version of Rainbow Islands (among others) has *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* as its theme music. This was changed to something more generic for the NES version, just in case of legal action.

RAINBOW ISLANDS: BUBBLE BOBBLE 2

Year 1991
Publisher Ocean
Developer Ocean

NO, YOU'RE NOT seeing double (rainbows). The European version of Rainbow Islands, released a few years after the North American one, was a completely different game. Whereas Taito's American port featured completely new stages from the arcade version, the EU game developed and published by Ocean is far more arcade accurate. The gameplay is still similar – rainbows do exactly the same thing in both versions of the game – but the level layouts are nothing alike. The debate over which version is the best is purely down to personal taste: the Ocean game may be more authentic, but it suffers from many of the issues other Ocean-developed NES games do, with poor music and less impressive visuals. ■

FACT

Rainbow Islands finally got a sequel in 2009 in the shape of the downloadable Rainbow Islands: Towering Adventure! on Wii and Xbox. It tried a new art style, which split opinion.

RALLY BIKE

Year 1990
Publisher Romstar
Developer Visco

RACING ACROSS THE United States is the order of the day in this town-to-town racing game. Riding atop a hefty motorbike, you start off in San Francisco and have to make your way to New York while overtaking opponents along the way in an attempt to increase your rank (which starts off at 50th). Along the way you have to top up on gasoline to prevent your journey from coming to an abrupt end, while picking up a motorcycle helmet icon (as if you aren't wearing one already) gives you invincibility for a while. If you manage to beat the game, it loops over and you have to start again from San Francisco, this time with a ranking of 60th instead. Harsh, if you ask me. ■

FACT

Publisher Romstar started in 1984 and started off as the US publisher for SNK's games (before SNK of America was founded) before publishing games for other studios. It eventually closed down in 1992, however.

RAMBO

Year 1988
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Pack-In Video

YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE of a movie tie-in that's perhaps a little too R-rated for a system that was mainly enjoyed by children, Rambo follows the plot of the second film in the series, *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, as the main man heads back to Vietnam to rescue POWs left behind after the war ended. Oddly, a large chunk of the game consists of Rambo attacking snakes, giant spiders, bees and other odd creatures with his combat knife. Don't worry though, you do get to kill plenty of humans too, and you do get to fire a gun eventually. The game is notorious for the ridiculous character icon it uses for Rambo during cut-scene dialogue, which certainly doesn't do Sylvester Stallone any favours. ■

FACT

Rambo gains experience as he kills enemies. When he levels up his strength increases. The Japanese version of the game has an 'Anger' meter instead of an 'Exp' one, though it works in exactly the same way.

RAMPAGE

Year 1988
Publisher Data East
Developer Data East

DO YOU EVER feel sorry for King Kong and Godzilla? The government always sends the army out to fire missiles at them, even though they're just doing what they do. Rampage feels the same way, and lets you control a massive monster as you try to even the score. Playing as either George the ape or Lizzie the lizard (wolfman Ralph isn't in the NES version), you have to climb the buildings in each stage and punch massive holes into the side of them, until their foundations are so weakened that they collapse in a pile of rubble. The army will shoot at you, but you can punch or eat them(!) to stop them bothering you. Rampage is a game where you're hugely overpowered, and it's all the better for it. ■

FACT

In late 2017 a toy manufacturer called Basic Fun released a mini arcade version of Rampage, containing a small LCD screen. It plays a modified version of the NES port, with Ralph the wolfman added back into the game.

RAMPART

Year 1992
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Bitmasters

PART PUZZLE GAME, part shooter, Rampart is a unique battle simulation where defence is just as important as attack. The game is played in two alternating waves: as enemy ships approach your castle(s) you have to fire cannonballs at them in order to destroy them, and prevent as much damage as possible being done to your castle walls. Once this wave is over, you then enter the puzzle phase, where you get a very limited time to rebuild your walls using Tetris-like pieces. If you can't build a complete wall around at least one of your castles before the time is up, it's Game Over. The result of all this is a brilliant game where your trigger finger and your puzzle-solving instincts are as important as each other. ■

FACT

If you absolutely must be a massive cheat, you can instantly win any game of Rampart by holding A, B and Select on the first controller, then pressing Select on the second controller.

REMOTE CONTROL

Year 1990
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer RSP

REMOTE CONTROL WAS the first MTV show that wasn't about music. It was a game show about all things television. This NES adaptation is pretty faithful to the show, and includes hundreds of questions. Players choose from one of nine random 'channels', each containing a category ranging from specific shows (*Saturday Night Live*, *Happy Days*, *MASH*) to more wide-ranging topics (wrestling, soaps, even MTV itself). After the first two rounds, one contestant is eliminated, leaving just two to take on the Lightning Round. Here rapid fire questions appear with 10 possible answers, and players have to select the right one quickly. The final round – in which contests gamble their money on a final question, *Jeopardy!* style – doesn't feature in the NES version. ■

FACT

Sometimes, one of the random channels you choose will be a Home Shopping channel. For being unlucky enough to select this channel, you lose 10 points.

THE REN & STIMPY SHOW: BUCKAROO$!

Year 1993
Publisher THQ
Developer Imagineering

IN THE EARLY '90s THQ got the licence for the controversial but much-loved *Ren & Stimpy Show*, and quickly set about making the most of it with a bunch of tie-ins (seven in two years). Buckaroo$! was the only one that made it to the NES: in it, Stimpy creates the Gametron 5000, a video game console that rewards the player with money. Players try out three of its 'games' – Space Madness, Out West and Robin Hoek – which are each just side-scrolling platformers where Ren and Stimpy are the playable characters. By the end of the game, the pair have made $47 million, but they end up with only $5 after Stimpy uses the rest 'to pay off the interest on the national debt for five seconds'. Topical. ■

FACT

Other Ren & Stimpy games included Space Cadet Adventures (Game Boy), Veediots (SNES and Game Boy), Quest for the Shaven Yak (Game Gear), Stimpy's Invention (Mega Drive), Fire Dogs (SNES) and Time Warp (SNES).

RENEGADE

Year 1988
Publisher Taito
Developer Technos Japan

TECHNOS JAPAN'S KUNIO-KUN series included a number of games that were ported over to the west, including Nintendo World Cup, Crash 'n the Boys and River City Ransom. The very first game in the series – Nekketsu Koha Kunio-kun – was given a makeover and released overseas as Renegade. This is a side-scrolling beat 'em up similar to Double Dragon (though Renegade came out first), where players punch, kick and jump kick their way through four multi-area stages as they try to reach the gun-toting final boss. Renegade's art style only bears a slight resemblance to the rest of the Kunio-kun games: it wasn't until the second game, Super Dodge Ball, that Technos adopted the chunky sprites that would become the series' trademark. ■

FACT

In a way, it's a shame that Taito and Technos didn't directly translate the Nekketsu Koha Kunio-kun name over to the western version: it roughly translates as 'hot-blooded cynic Kunio'.

RESCUE: THE EMBASSY MISSION

Year 1990
Publisher Kemco
Developer Kemco

A UNIQUE GAME with four different play styles in one. The aim is to rescue hostages in an embassy building, so the first phase involves getting snipers into position by getting them stealthily through side-scrolling sections while avoiding enemy spotlights. Once in position they have to shoot any enemies they see in the windows. Step three is slowly guiding the abseiling SWAT team down from the roof and into the windows, at which point the game becomes a primitive first person shooter as you go through the embassy shooting all the terrorists. Rescue is a very short game – you can complete the whole mission in under 10 minutes – but it's one that was arguably far ahead of its time. ■

FACT

Rescue was originally released on home computers in 1988 as Hostages and developed by French studio Infogrames. Although the NES version is vague about which embassy you're freeing, the other versions at least make it clear that it's an embassy in Paris.

RING KING

Year 1987
Publisher Data East
Developer Namco

ALTHOUGH PUNCH-OUT!! IS the undisputed NES boxing champion, Ring King – based on a 1985 arcade game – arguably runs it a close second. It certainly plays more like boxing than Nintendo's game does: while Punch-Out!! consists of standing still in one spot and looking for punch patterns to dodge and counter, Ring King instead focuses more on movement, with players able to move around the entire ring to try and close down opponents. The Ranking mode has you fighting a series of boxers to become champ: once you do you can keep defending your title, using a password system to save your career record. Character progression is also important: you start by allocating nine skill points to Punch, Speed and Stamina stats, and gain more through training matches. ■

FACT

Ring King is notorious for its animation between rounds. Some claim it shows your cornerman innocently adjusting your groin guard, but others say it looks a little less family-friendly than that.

RIVER CITY RANSOM

Year 1990
Publisher Technos / Infogrames
Developer Technos Japan

OF ALL THE Kunio-kun games localised for the west, River City Ransom (known as Street Gangs in Europe) is probably the most well-loved. At first glance it's a standard side-scrolling beat 'em up similar to Double Dragon, but there's a level of depth here that's rarely seen in examples of the genre even to this day.

The story goes that Slick, the most powerful gang lord in River City, has declared that he and his gangs are now in charge of the streets, and have taken the High School over. Two students, Alex and Ryan, weren't at school when Slick seized control, so now they have to fight their way in and free the imprisoned students, including Ryan's girlfriend. While most beat 'em ups consist of linear stages, River City is instead one large interconnected map players can explore freely. The game's also heavy on RPG elements: your character has nine different stats ranging from punching and kicking power to agility, throwing strength and stamina, and all the enemies you face have their own stats too.

FACT

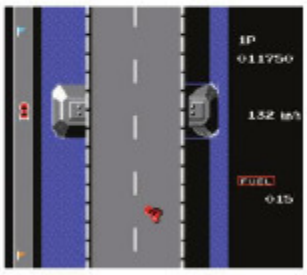
River City Ransom returned in 2017 in an official sequel called River City Ransom: Underground. It includes 140 levels, 10 playable heroes and online co-op.

These stats can be boosted by visiting any of the 23 shops dotted around River City. Shoe shops sell items that can increase your agility, while drugstores sell things to increase your stamina. Most important are the bookstores, though: while the books they sell are expensive, they teach you new moves to perform.

The final cherry on top of River City Ransom is its brilliant two-player co-op mode. Players can actually pick up their partner and use them as a weapon, throwing them at their enemies. ■

ROAD FIGHTER

Year 1991
Publisher Palcom
Developer Konami



THIS TOP-DOWN RACING game has you speeding through four courses – a suburban neighbourhood, a large bridge, a narrow seaside road and a desert highway – as you try to reach the finish line before your fuel runs out. There are five types of vehicle on the road: yellow cars and trucks drive straight and are easily avoided, while red and blue cars behave erratically and may swerve into you at the last minute. Most important are multicoloured fuel cars, which you can 'collect' by driving into them to top up your fuel. If you can beat all four stages you play through them again in a much harder mode, where most yellow cars are replaced with red and blue ones, and fuel cars are far less common. ■

FACT

Road Fighter got a sequel in 1996. Midnight Run: Road Fighter 2 (which was released in arcades and on the PlayStation in Japan) plays completely differently, opting for a third-person behind-the-car viewpoint more conventional for its time.

ROADBLASTERS

Year 1990
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Beam Software

SIMILAR TO NINTENDO'S Mach Rider but easier to play, RoadBlasters puts players behind the wheel of an armoured car and challenges them to make their way through 50 levels of post-apocalyptic highway, reaching the end of each before their fuel runs out. Your car is armed with a standard artillery gun, which can be used to blast enemy cars as they approach. From time to time a support jet will appear and drop a special weapon onto your hood: these include rapid fire Uzi cannons, nitro boosts, electro shields (which basically let you plough through everyone) and cruise missiles. As well as enemy cars you also need to deal with gun turrets located on the side of the road, as well as landmines and toxic spills. ■

FACT

RoadBlasters actually had its own toy line by Matchbox. It consisted of 16 die-cast cars with clip-on armour and weapons, as well as a bunch of playsets and a giant loop-the-loop called Run the Gauntlet.

ROBIN HOOD: PRINCE OF THIEVES

Year 1991
Publisher Virgin Games
Developer Sculptured Software

BASED ON THE blockbuster Kevin Costner movie of the same name, Prince of Thieves follows the adventures of Robin Hood of Locksley as he tries to escape prison with his friend Peter Dubois and save England by putting an end to the evil Sheriff of Nottingham. The game has three different viewpoints that trigger depending on the action: for the most part it's a top-down adventure where you fight enemies and talk to various characters. During key duels the action will switch to a side-on view, while for epic battles you'll get an overhead view that's zoomed out far more than normal. Although it generally follows the film's plot, it does add some side-quests that aren't in the movie: Robin trying to protect a village from a giant boar, for example. ■

FACT

Although the game features character portraits from the movie, it mixes up the portraits for the Sheriff of Nottingham and Guy of Gisbourne by mistake.

ROBOCOP

Year 1989
Publisher Data East / Ocean
Developer SAS Sakata / Data East

THE FUTURE OF law enforcement is here. Part man, part machine, all cop: RoboCop is ready to empty all the bullets he owns into Detroit's law-breaking scum. In order to complete this objective, Robo has to make his way through six side-scrolling stages – taking in Old Detroit, City Hall, a warehouse, OCP Headquarters, a steelworks and the OCP boardroom – punching and shooting his way through countless enemies. He has two separate energy bars: one is a standard health meter, while the other is his battery life (which ticks down regardless and needs to be replenished regularly with new batteries). Boss fights include a pair of battles against evil drug lord Clarence Boddicker, and two fights against the intimidating battle robot ED-209. ■

FACT

Other versions of Robocop published by Ocean have a calm, beautiful title theme. Comedian Charlie Brooker picked the Game Boy version as one of the eight songs he'd take with him to a desert island in UK radio show Desert Island Discs.

ROBOCOP 2

Year 1991
Publisher Data East / Ocean
Developer Painting by Numbers

THINGS ARE GETTING worse in Detroit. The police are on strike, crime is through the roof and a deadly new drug called Nuke is doing the rounds. Time for RoboCop to clean up the streets (again) and take out crime baron Cain, while also dealing with OCP's dangerous new prototype, RoboCop 2. You have to collect at least 60 per cent of the Nuke in each stage: if you fail to do so before reaching the end of the level, you're given a 'second chance' in the form of a shooting gallery bonus game. Pass it and you'll move on to the next level, fail and you have to replay the whole stage. The game also enforces an arrest rate: instead of shooting everyone, you have to 'arrest' at least 60 per cent of enemies. ■

FACT

You arrest criminals by walking into them. If you think this sounds dangerous, don't worry: the only ones that need arresting are those suffering from drug overdoses. They're literally on their knees and screaming as you 'collect' them.

ROBOCOP 3

Year 1992
Publisher Ocean
Developer Probe Software

OCP IS CLEARING out Old Detroit to make way for the construction of Delta City. RoboCop, upset at seeing poor families being turfed out of their homes, decides to join the resistance and fight. This time he's armed with a load of different guns and gizmos (including a jetpack that doesn't really work very well) and can fire diagonally: truly he is the officer of the future. The biggest addition here, however, is an interesting body damage system. RoboCop's head, legs, arms and body all have separate health meters, and taking too much damage in one area can affect how he behaves. Too much arm damage means his aiming will be less accurate, while too much leg damage affects his ability to walk and jump. ■

FACT

There was an NES version of SNES and Mega Drive game RoboCop vs the Terminator planned, but though the prototype was more or less completed it was never released.

ROBOWARRIOR

Year 1988
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Aicom / Hudson Soft

IN THE YEAR 4431, the planet of Altile – built to host some of Earth's people to solve overpopulation – is invaded by Xur, an alien from another dimension. Altile sends out a distress call to its sister planet Earth, which promptly sends out ZED, its most powerful RoboWarrior. ZED has to make its way to Altile's weather control station to face and defeat Xur, so it heads off with a gun and an endless supply of bombs at its disposal. If bombs sound like a curious choice of weapon, that's because RoboWarrior is actually a Bomberman spin-off. Known as Bomber King in Japan, it plays very similarly to Hudson's more popular bomb-based series, but opts for a more serious look than Bomberman's cartoonish art style. ■

FACT

RoboWarrior got a Game Boy sequel known as Bomber King: Scenario 2. In the west it was renamed to fit in with the Blaster Master games instead: Blaster Master Jr in Europe, and Blaster Master Boy in North America.

ROCK 'N BALL

Year 1990
Publisher NTVIC
Developer KID

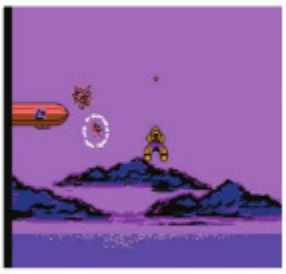
THIS SERIES OF pinball mini-games consists of a mix of standard fare and more unusual alternatives. Normal pinball is naturally the main mode, featuring a scrolling table that's around two screens high. Then there's Battle Flipper, which is a two-player mode (you can play against the CPU if you want) where there's a set of flippers at either end of the table: players have to shoot the ball past the obstacles on the table and try to force it onto their opponent's half, putting pressure on them to miss it. Nineball is a sort of cross between pachinko and bingo, where you hit the ball between a series of pins and have to light up a straight line, while Sports Pinball offers two more two-player games based on football and ice hockey. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of Rock 'n Ball was published by Namco, and so included characters from various Namco games including Pac-Man. The western release replaces them with original characters.

ROCKET RANGER

Year 1990
Publisher Kemco
Developer Beam Software



A GROUP OF aliens descends upon Europe and establishes a new country called Greater Leutonia before deciding to conquer the world. You play as a young American scientist who's just completed his greatest invention, a rocket-powered flying suit. It's time to become the Rocket Ranger and save the day. You must travel to various countries, collecting pieces of a rocket which will let you fly into space to kill the aliens. The game consists of numerous playing styles, from a strategy section where you assign agents to different countries to collect info on the aliens, to hand-to-hand combat sections (and flying stages too, of course). If aliens flying a Zeppelin sounds odd, that's because the game was originally about Nazis but had to be changed to fit Nintendo's guidelines. ■

FACT

Rocket Ranger was originally developed by US studio Cinemaware. Beam Software ported a number of other Cinemaware games to the NES, including The Three Stooges and Defender of the Crown.

THE ROCKETEER

Year 1991
Publisher Bandai
Developer Ironwind Software

DISNEY'S 1991 SUPERHERO film about a jetpack flying stuntman was crying out for a video game adaptation, and so here we have this NES take. Playing as the movie's hero Cliff Secord, you have to rescue your girlfriend Jenny: she's been kidnapped by rival movie star Neville Sinclair, who wants the rocket pack so he can give it to the Nazis (or simply 'the enemy forces in Europe', as they're known here). This is an action platformer with six levels, and while for the most part Cliff resorts to punching and shooting his enemies, he can indeed activate the jetpack: his fuel is limited, though, so you can't just go flying about all over the place. It may be called The Rocketeer but calm down. ■

FACT

At the end of the game you fight Neville Sinclair aboard a Zeppelin, meaning the NES has two separate games about a man in a rocket-powered jetpack fighting a Zeppelin-flying enemy.

ROCKIN' KATS

Year 1991
Publisher Atlus
Developer Atlus

ALTHOUGH PLATFORM GAMES starring anthropomorphic animals didn't really start dominating the games industry until the 16-bit days (thanks, Sonic the Hedgehog), there were still a few on the NES. Rockin' Kats is one such game, starring a cat called Willy who has to save his girlfriend Jill from an evil gang leader named Mugsy. She was cat-burgled, you could say (sorry). Willy is armed with a Punch Gun, one of those extendable boxing glove contraptions you sometimes see in cartoons. It's a handy piece of kit, too: not only can you punch enemies from a distance, you can also use it to grab onto higher platforms and catch falling items. You can even punch the ground and use the impact to perform a super jump. ■

FACT

After you finish the game, Mugsy appears and challenges you to take on one last bonus stage. Here all your power-ups are taken from you and you only have three lives, making it extremely tricky.

ROD LAND

Year 1993
Publisher Storm Sales Curve
Developer Jaleco

RIT AND TAM are two young fairies who are distraught because their mum has been kidnapped by a monster and imprisoned in a tower. Time to get her back, by fighting through 31 stages and four boss battles. Although it's nothing to do with Bubble Bobble or its threequel Parasol Stars, Rod Land does have a number of similarities (especially with the latter). Stages take place in small enclosed spaces – often single rooms in size – and you have a special ability which lets you stun enemies. Here it isn't the ability to fire bubbles: in Rod Land you have a magic wand which freezes an enemy in its tracks so you can grab it and smash it on the ground. ■

FACT

The NES version of Rod Land was the first game Jools Watsham worked on. In the 2010s, Watsham created games like Mutant Mudds and Xeodrifter for 3DS and Nintendo Switch.

ROGER CLEMENS' MVP BASEBALL

Year 1991
Publisher LJN
Developer Sculptured Software

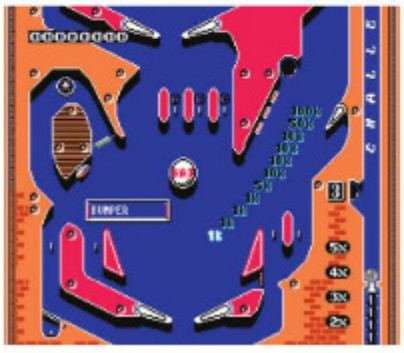
AS YOU'LL KNOW if you've been reading this book cover to cover, the NES was positively teeming with baseball games. Roger Clemens' MVP Baseball is yet another one, and this time it's lacking both the MLB and MLBPA licenses. Although it has 26 teams, they don't have official logos or nicknames (Montreal Lumberjacks vs Cleveland Tomahawks, anyone?), and every player name is fake. Every one, that is, except for Boston Red Sox favourite and 11-time All-Star Roger Clemens. As well as exhibition games, you can also take on a full 162-game season, with a password system to keep track of your progress. Naturally, winning your division will get you into the best-of-7 Division Championship, followed by the 'Championship Series'. ■

FACT

Many of the fake player names are references to their real-life counterparts. Cal Ripken Jr is 'Nekpir' (his surname backwards), Vance Law is called 'Order' and Darryl Strawberry is 'Raspberry'.

ROLLERBALL

Year 1990
Publisher HAL Laboratory
Developer HAL Laboratory



THIS HAS NOTHING to do with the 1975 James Caan movie about a dystopian roller derby death sport. Instead, it's a pinball game – one of many developed by HAL – with a New York City theme. In reality, if it was a real pinball table it would be ridiculously long: while most actual physical pinball tables are roughly two 'screens' long (in NES terms), this one consists of four screens, meaning it would look a bit silly in real life. In game form, though, it helps keep things more varied and interesting, and ensures your game lasts longer: after all, if you're on the top screen you know you'll need to lose the ball three times in a row before losing a life. ■

FACT

Rollerball also has a single-screen Match Play mode where two players compete simultaneously. It's an oddly political-themed mode, with each player representing either an elephant or a donkey

ROLLERBLADE RACER

Year 1993
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer Radiance

ROLLERBLADES WERE A huge fad throughout the '80s and '90s, and this officially licensed Rollerblade game attempted to capitalise on that. You play as Kirk, a young boy who's just got his first pair of Rollerblades and already dreams of entering the Super Rollerblade Challenge (steady on, son). You have to make your way through four stages – the suburbs, city, beach and park – plus a few bonus levels, trying to rack up 5,000 points along the way. If you can manage this you qualify for the final stage, the Super Rollerblade Challenge, which is pretty much just a bunch of barrels and cones laid out on the road. Still, despite this Kirk still seems happy with his Rollerblades, and I suppose that's the most important thing. ■

FACT

So many NES games have typos in their dialogue, and Rollerblade Racer is no different. When you beat the game, Kirk tells you: 'I can't wait wait for us to do it again!'

ROLLERGAMES

Year 1990
Publisher Konami / Ultra Games
Developer Konami

ROLLERGAMES WAS A short-lived TV show that was essentially a combination of roller derby and professional wrestling (it had fictional storylines). The NES tie-in uses the same logo but is nothing like the show: instead, it's a side-scrolling action game set in the twenty-first century (when that was still considered the future), in which three teams from the show – the T-Birds, the Rockers and Hot Flash – have to skate through six platform-based stages while beating up members of the evil VIPER terrorist gang (that's Vicious International Punks and Eternal Renegades, if you're asking). These stages are split into 2D platforming sections, eight-directional beat 'em up sections and auto-scrolling sections, and while your character is wearing rollerskates you wouldn't know it: they can stop on a dime. ■

FACT

Konami also made a RollerGames arcade game: this was far more like the TV show and had teams competing in a faithful rendition of its unique figure-8 rink.

ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS

Year 1989
Publisher Koei
Developer Koei

THE FIRST IN what would become a lengthy and much-loved series of historical strategy games that continues to this day (the 13th game was released in 2016). Set in China during the Han dynasty, there are five different scenarios to choose from between 189 AD and 215 AD. After choosing your scenario and which master you'd like to play as, you start on your quest to unify China's 58 states and conquer the nation. You do this via a whole host of potential actions: increasing your rice and gold stocks, training your troops, keeping your generals happy, and so forth. You can also try improving diplomatic relationships with other empires by gifting horses or even offering one of your daughters as part of an arranged marriage. ■

FACT

According to the back of the box, the events in Romance of the Three Kingdoms are 'so real, you will swear you're living in Second Century China'.

ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS II

Year 1991
Publisher Koei
Developer Koei

THE SEQUEL TO Romance of the Three Kingdoms doesn't do anything massively different to its predecessor, it just does it better. There are six scenarios to choose from this time, though they're mostly set in similar time frames as the five in the first game. The main difference in Romance II is the addition of a 'trust' rating. While both games have a rating for your people's loyalty in you, the trust rating instead determines what your officers think of you. The more they trust you, the easier it is to recruit more officers from other leaders. Certain actions – like collecting special tax or warring with a province you previously sent your daughter to for an arranged marriage – will lower your trust. ■

FACT

Koei's popular Dynasty Warriors series began as a hack-and-slash spin-off of Romance of the Three Kingdoms. Its Dynasty Tactics series is an attempt to combine the two.

ROUNDBALL: 2 ON 2 CHALLENGE

Year 1992
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Park Place Productions

SOMEONE SHOULD PROBABLY have told Mindscape that 'basketball' isn't a trademarked name, because it's hard to imagine any other reason it would call its game Roundball instead. Despite its exotic title, Roundball is a straightforward two-on-two basketball game where you choose two players from a pool of 24 and compete in either an exhibition game or a three-game tournament. There's also the option to play one-on-one games, if that's more your sort of thing. Unlike most two-on-two basketball games of its era, Roundball isn't a no-rules situation: the referee will still call fouls from time to time. Sadly, the ref never sees fit to call out the biggest foul of all, which is of course the decision to name the game Roundball instead of absolutely anything else. ■

FACT

Most of Roundball's 24 players are named after members of the development team. Three-pointer legend Hanson is programmer Jim Hanson, while field goal supremo Lyndon is designer Troy A. Lyndon.

RUSH'N ATTACK

Year 1987
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

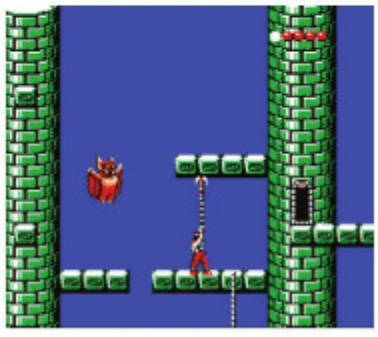
AS ITS NOT-SO-SUBTLE title suggests, Rush'n Attack is a Cold War themed game which has you dropping deep behind Soviet lines in an attempt to destroy their secret weapons (and rescue American POWs, according to the manual, though this never happens). Although it's technically a run-and-gun game similar to Contra, Rush'n Attack generally has a lot more running than gunning: your nameless special ops soldier is usually armed only with a combat knife, though you can occasionally collect rocket launchers, grenades and pistols from fallen enemies. There are six stages in total: an iron bridge and missile base, an airport, a harbour, a forest and airshed, a warehouse and a final enemy base level. The airport and enemy base are exclusive to the NES version. ■

FACT

Rush'n Attack got an official sequel in 2011. Rush'n Attack: Ex-Patriot was a download-only Metroidvania style game for PS3 and Xbox 360. It was terrible and was quickly forgotten.

RYGAR

Year 1987
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo



THE HOLY LAND of Argool was founded by five legendary gods. One day the evil king Ligar took over Argool in his flying castle and 'established the kingdom of evil'. The people of Argool's prayers were so strong that they resurrected Rygar, a long-dead hero, who now has to defeat Ligar's army to restore peace. Initially armed with an odd spiked yo-yo, Rygar's inventory grows as his quest continues, with him eventually collecting a rope pulley, grappling hook and a magical flute. These let him reach previously inaccessible areas, much like a Metroidvania style game. There was also a Rygar arcade game released the year before the Nintendo version, but it's far a more linear adventure than the NES game's free-roaming affair. ■

FACT

The Rygar manual has some strange translation issues, which culminate gloriously in a section about the game's enemies featuring the bizarre headline: 'Animalized Men Wriggling Eerily'.

S.C.A.T. - SPECIAL CYBERNETIC ATTACK TEAM

Year 1991
Publisher Natsume / Infogrames
Developer Natsume

THIS FUTURISTIC SHOOT 'em up was renamed Action in New York in the UK and Australia, presumably because someone realised 'scat' could also be considered a rude term. Regardless, the game is set in 2029 and has a pair of S.C.A.T. soldiers heading out to save New York from an alien threat. Flying around in your jetpack, stages scroll both horizontally and vertically, while co-op play is also available. The PAL version didn't just change the name of the game, it did the same with the two protagonists too: the suspiciously Schwarzenegger-like 'Arnold' and the curiously Weaver-esque 'Sigourney' were renamed Silver Man and Sparks instead. And just to make sure there was definitely no confusion, the team was changed to S.A.T. (Special Attack Team). ■

FACT

The character profiles in the game's intro are uncomfortable to look at: the portrait of the character and their text stats swap back and forth every frame: the result is a flickery image seemingly showing both at once.

SECTION-Z

Year 1987
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

A UNIQUE TAKE on the scrolling shoot 'em up genre, Section-Z has you playing as one-time Capcom hero Captain Commando as he flies through space fighting the evil space soldiers of Balangool as you try to reach Section-Z, where its master control program L-Brain is located. Obviously, shooting aliens in space isn't the unique part: it's the way the levels are structured. The game consists of three main stages, each made up of 20 smaller 'sections'. When you reach the end of a section there are two exits, each taking you somewhere different. For example, the top exit in Section 04 leads to Section 06, but the bottom one takes you all the way back to Section 01. This makes it part shooter, part maze game: drawing a map is crucial. ■

FACT

Because the sections are numbered, there isn't actually a 'Section-Z' in the game. The name comes from the arcade version, which has no maze feature and instead has 26 linear stages named A–Z.

SEICROSS

Year 1988
Publisher FCI
Developer Nichibutsu

SEICROSS IS A strange one: it's a side-scrolling shoot 'em up where you race in a special miniature rescue bike called a Gilgitt Petras. While on this bike you have to destroy enemies and any scenery that gets in your way, while also rescuing your fellow Petrans. There are three stages in the game, which repeat endlessly and get harder. The first is the Obstacle Zone, where you have to shoot 'ancient obstacles' while trying to shoot or ram enemy bikes into barriers. The second is the brilliantly named Slippery Zone, where the enemies are removed and you just have to navigate the course. Finally, there's the Battery Zone where you face off against Dinosaur Tanks that shoot flaming dino heads at you. Sadly, this is not as cool as it sounds. ■

FACT

The 'lives' counter in Seicross is written in base-16 code instead of normal decimal numerals (base-10). When you get ten lives, the counter reads '0A' instead of '10'.

SESAME STREET: 1-2-3

Year 1989
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer Rare

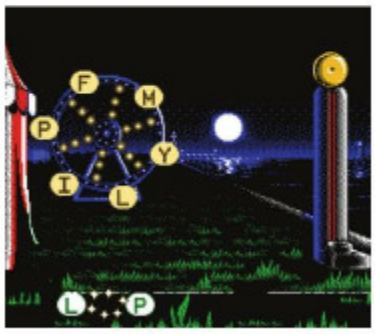
THE FIRST OF two *Sesame Street* games developed by Rare, Sesame Street: 1-2-3 contains two different educational games for younger games. The first is Ernie's Magic Shapes, which despite the 1-2-3 title has nothing to do with numbers. A shape is shown at the top of the screen, and the player has to help Ernie use his magic hat to conjure a shape that's either the shape or colour (depending on the mode chosen). The second game is Astro-Grover, which does actually include mathematical problems, thereby doing the game's 1-2-3 name justice. It consists of five space-themed mini-games where players perform either counting, addition or subtraction tasks to help Grover count aliens, beam a specific number of aliens aboard and launch his spaceship. ■

FACT

The NES Sesame Street games weren't the first: there were three released in 1983 for the Atari 2600. These were Alpha Beam with Ernie, Big Bird's Egg Catch and Cookie Monster Munch.

SESAME STREET: A-B-C

Year 1989
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer Rare



THE OTHER RARE-DEVELOPED Sesame Street title offers another two educational games for the kiddies. Much like the Ernie game in 1-2-3, Ernie's Big Splash has nothing to do with the alphabet theme here: instead players have to create a path of pipes and water splashes for Ernie's rubber duck to follow so it can successfully end up in Ernie's bath. The main event, then, is Letter Go Round: this one features a large Ferris Wheel with letters on it. You're given a letter to match and have to press the A button when the right letter is at the bottom of the wheel, cueing a cameo from the likes of Big Bird, Cookie Monster and Ernie, who'll dance for you. ■

FACT

Unlike in Sesame Street 1-2-3, the title screen of A-B-C actually plays the *Sesame Street* theme tune, and even has a bouncing ball with lyrics you can sing along to.

SESAME STREET: BIG BIRD'S HIDE & SPEAK

Year 1990
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer RSP

A YEAR AFTER 1-2-3 and A-B-C, Hi Tech released another *Sesame Street* game. Rare had moved on to other projects so development duties shifted to five-man team RSP. As the name suggests, Hide & Speak's main selling point is the impressive amount of speech in the game, something that was still at a fairly primitive level at this point in gaming. There are six games here, all based around the idea of finding characters and letters that are hiding. Big Bird talks to the player throughout, naming characters or letters he wants you to find, or words he wants you to spell. Get it right and you'll sometimes get a little animation, like the Count juggling numbered balls or Grover using a pogo stick. ■

FACT

The speech was provided by Electronic Speech Systems, a company specialising in clear software speech technology. It also helped with the speech for a number of Commodore 64 games including Impossible Mission and Ghostbusters.

SESAME STREET: COUNTDOWN

Year 1992
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer RSP

THE LAST OF the four NES Sesame Street games is probably the most impressive. Countdown is an educational platform game which stars the Count (of course it does) as he travels around in search of the 'Number of the Day'. You spin a wheel at the start to determine what the number is, and then make your way through a platformer stage trying to collect every occurence of that number while avoiding all the other numbers getting in the way. There are also 'bonus balloons' that take the Count up to a secret area where the player can make an extra match. If you haven't collected enough of the number by the time you reach the end of the stage, the Count will make you do it again. ■

FACT

As with Big Bird's Hide & Speak, Countdown features some high quality speech, among the best on the NES. This time it's all voiced by Jerry Nelson, who was the actual voice of the Count.

SHADOW OF THE NINJA

Year 1990
Publisher Natsume / Taito
Developer Natsume

THE YEAR IS 2029 and New York City is controlled by a madman called Emperor Garuda. Garuda is worried, though, because he's heard that there are two ninja on the way to take him out. Sure enough, you play as these ninja, Hayate and Lady Kaede, as they fight their way through Garuda's soldiers (there's a two-player simultaneous co-op mode, or you can choose either character in single-player). There are five stages here – a port, sewers, rooftops, an air fortress and the 'final' fortress – and while you start with a katana sword, you can eventually upgrade to a kusarigama (a sickle and chain). Because of the UK's short-lived ban on ninja content, it was renamed Blue Shadow in European territories. ■

FACT

Natsume also developed a Game Boy version of Shadow of the Ninja, but Ninja Gaiden studio Tecmo got the publishing rights and decided to build on its own ninja brand by renaming it Ninja Gaiden Shadow.

SHADOWGATE

Year 1989
Publisher Kemco
Developer ICOM Simulations

THIS FANTASY POINT-AND-CLICK adventure has you playing as a nameless hero, the last of a long line of kings. You have to enter the Castle Shadowgate and navigate its booby-trapped corridors to find and defeat the Warlock Lord, preventing him from summoning a massive titan called the Behemoth and using it to terrorise the land. The game is well-known for the numerous varied ways you can die, which come with surprisingly colourful descriptions (especially given Nintendo's tendency to censor graphic content). After you've been set on fire by a dragon, the game declares that 'not even your best friend could recognise your burning body', and after you've been eaten by a shark it states: 'Even before the life has left your body, the lake will be filled with your blood.' ■

FACT

You can even kill yourself in Shadowgate if you aren't careful. Choosing the Use command, selecting your sword and selecting 'self' has you impaling yourself and committing suicide.

SHATTERHAND

Year 1991
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Natsume

HAVE YOU EVER wondered how most beat 'em up heroes have unrealistically strong punches that can break open crates, smash through cars and the like? At least Shatterhand tries to address this oddity: you play as Steve Hermann, a rookie police officer who loses his arms while fighting an army of cyborg soldiers called the Metal Command and has them replaced with two cybernetic ones. Now known as codename Shatterhand, he has to defeat Metal Command by punching lumps out of everything he can get his unnaturally powerful hands on. When being able to jab your way through steel doors isn't exciting enough, you can also collect power-ups to summon one of eight robot helpers, which will float alongside you and attack enemies with various weapons. ■

FACT

The Japanese Famicom version of Shatterhand is based on a TV series called *Super Rescue Solbrain*, which is about a high-tech armour-wearing police force.

SHINGEN THE RULER

Year 1990
Publisher HOT-B
Developer HOT-B

A TURN-BASED STRATEGY game that owes more than its fair share to Koei's historical efforts, but tends to have a little more focus on battle tactics. It's set during the Sengoku period of Japan (1467–1603) and has you controlling real-life feudal lord Takeda Shingen and his son Katsuyori as you attempt to conquer other lords and rule all 21 territories in Japan. The action is split into two main modes: the 'domestic administration mode' is where you give orders to your territories and build up your military, while in 'battle mode' you can take part in field fights and lay siege to enemy castles. Terrain plays a big part in Shingen's battles: soldiers move slower (or not at all) over certain surfaces, and can hide in forests to avoid enemy projectiles. ■

FACT

The Akira Kurosawa film *Kagemusha* is based on the life of Takeda Shingen. It's not clear whether Shingen died due to an old war wound or being shot by a sniper, but it's the latter story that Kurosawa goes with.

SHOOTING RANGE

Year 1989
Publisher Bandai
Developer Tose

THERE WEREN'T MANY third-party Zapper-only games released on the NES, but Bandai's Shooting Range is certainly part of that elite group. If the name implies simplicity to you, you'd be right: Shooting Range gives players four different types of shooting stage and not much else. The first is a Wild West stage where you shoot Native Americans, cowboys and birds. The second is a ghost house where you shoot spooks, mummies and Frankenstein's monster. Third is a bonus stage, where shooting bottles of beer is the order of the day. Finally there's the space stage, which involves shooting various strange alien creatures while on the surface of the moon. Shooting Range is nothing groundbreaking, but given how uncommon Zapper games were its presence is nonetheless welcome. ■

FACT

The final stage, set in space, has one creature that looks suspiciously like the titular creature in Ridley Scott's *Alien*, complete with an extendable jaw.

SHORT ORDER & EGGSPLODE!

Year 1989
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Tose

IF NEW ZAPPER games were thin on the ground, new Power Pad games were practically a single atom thick. Nintendo threw owners of the early dance mat a bone by releasing two games on a single cartridge. Short Order is a burger-making game where a pig gives you a list of ingredients and you have have memorise them, then step on the Power Pad to add them in the right order. It eventually gets ridiculous, with orders up to 100 ingredients in length. Eggsplode, meanwhile, shows you a grid of twelve hens – one for each Power Pad panel – each sitting on a nest. A fox will come and slip bombs under some of the nests: you have to step on them to defuse them before they explode. ■

FACT

There were only six games released for the Power Pad in total in the west, over the course of two years. Short Order & Eggsplode! was the last of these.

SIDE POCKET

Year 1987
Publisher Data East
Developer Data East

THIS POOL GAME was memorable not just for playing a solid game of pool, but also for the presence of a trick shot mode, something that was uncommon at the time. The main mode tasks you with playing your way through various championships – city champion, state champion and US champion – until you finally find yourself aiming to become the world champion. This is all well and good but it's the trick shots that give Side Pocket its character: every now and then you'll be presented with an awkward situation and asked to pot the balls, often in specific pockets. Some of them even add props to make things more interesting: potting is harder than you think when there are obstacles like wine glasses and pool cues in the way. ■

FACT

Side Pocket got two sequels on Sega systems. Side Pocket 2 (Mega Drive and Saturn) was renamed Minnesota Fats: Pool Legend for the US, while Side Pocket 3 (Saturn and PlayStation) only made it to Japan.

SILENT SERVICE

Year 1989
Publisher Ultra Games / Konami
Developer Rare

NO, THIS ISN'T a game about what you get when you've annoyed your partner. It's a submarine simulation game set in the Pacific Ocean during the Second World War, where you control a United States submarine taking on Japanese ships. The game has three different playable scenarios: Torpedo/Gun Practice has you doing a drill as you try to destroy four static, unarmed ships. Convoy Practice lets you choose from six historical scenarios which took place during the war to see how you would have coped, while War Patrol is a more action-focused mode where you choose one of five historical subs and set about destroying as many enemy ships as you can. The original version was designed by Sid Meier (Pirates, Civilization) but the NES port was handled by Rare. ■

FACT

Silent Service got a sequel (the cleverly named Silent Scope II), which was released on Amiga, Atari ST and PC. It too was set in the Pacific Ocean during the Second World War.

SILKWORM

Year 1990
Publisher Sammy
Developer Sammy

IT'S THAT CLASSIC story: in 'the 1990s' scientists create an artificial brain called MHC2, but it becomes smarter than them and decides to take over the world. World leaders ask Robert and Stacey, codenamed Silkworm, to head out and destroy MHC2. At first glance Silkworm is a standard side-scrolling shooter but it has one interesting gimmick: players can control either a helicopter (the G-Cobra) or a jeep (the B-Panther). The former can easily attack air enemies and fires bombs to hit ground targets, whereas the latter can take out ground forces with ease but has to use missiles to hit airborne foes. Ideally, then, the game is best played in 2-player co-op mode, with each player controlling a different vehicle. ■

FACT

Silkworm was ported to home computers by The Sales Curve, which then made its own unofficial sequel called SWIV. According to the manual, 'SWIV' stood for 'Silkworm IV'.

SILVER SURFER

Year 1990
Publisher Arcadia Systems
Developer Software Creations

A SHOOT 'EM up based on the popular Marvel Comics character. The Surfer is summoned by Galactus, who tells him about a powerful device that could break a hole in the fabric of space, allowing the hordes from Magik to break into the universe and take over. Ol' Surfy has to fly through six levels and defeat the super villains waiting there, each of whom has a piece of the device. Each level is split into three smaller stages, each of which is either a side-scrolling shooting section or a top-down vertical-scrolling one. At the end of each level lies one of the bosses: Reptyl, Firelord, Possessor, Emperor, Mephisto and a final battle in the Magik Domain against an unrecognisable villain, claimed by some to be Mister Sinister. ■

FACT

A level select image of the In-Betweener, another enemy from the Silver Surfer comics, lies unused in the game's code. It seems he was supposed to be a seventh boss but was scrapped.

THE SIMPSONS: BART VS THE SPACE MUTANTS

Year 1991
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Imagineering

ALIENS HAVE INVADED Springfield, and they plan to take over the world! Only one person witnessed them landing in their spaceship, and by pure chance it was none other than Bart Simpson. It's up to Bart to stop the aliens' plans and save Earth from extra-terrestrial domination.

The space mutants can disguise themselves to look like normal humans, but will damage Bart if he walks into them. In a nod to John Carpenter's sci-fi gem *They Live*, Bart can identify the aliens by putting on a pair of X-Ray glasses, which exposes normal-looking Springfield citizens as tentacle-haired creatures. You can jump on aliens' heads to kill them, but jumping on innocent people will also harm you.

Each stage also has a set of 'ingredients' the aliens need to build their ultimate weapon, so Bart has to stop this too. In most levels this means simply collecting things – this includes hats, balloons, exit signs and power rods – but the first stage is more unusual in that you instead have to cover up any purple objects you see.

This makes the first level more of a puzzle-based affair, as you try to work out how to change the colour of various

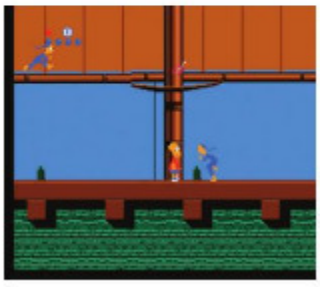
objects. Some of them can be spray painted red, but others need a bit more thought: you'll be walking on washing lines to drop sheets over purple items, using fire hydrants to wash off purple paint and using fireworks to scare away purple birds. It's a clever concept that's ditched in later stages in favour of simple item collection. ■

FACT

One of the game's side-missions is trying to convince other Simpsons to help you out. For example, if you can win over Maggie in the first stage she'll turn up for your boss fight with Nelson and give you bowling balls to attack him with.

THE SIMPSONS: BART VS THE WORLD

Year 1991
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Imagineering



BART HAS WON the chance to go on the Worldwide Krusty Treasure Hunt, an around-the-world trip where he has to find Krusty items scattered in various real-life locations. What he doesn't know is that the whole thing is a scam set up by Mr Burns to get rid of the Simpsons. Bart has to make his way through China, the North Pole, Egypt and Hollywood, taking on a mix of standard platform stages and single-screen bonus stages. The latter includes slot machines, sliding puzzles, Simpsons trivia quizzes and card-matching games.

Along the way you encounter some of Mr Burns' long-lost family members, including the Abominable Snow Burns in the North Pole, Ramses Burns in Egypt and the slightly questionable Fu Manchu Burns in China. ■

FACT

Around the same time as Bart vs the World was released, another Simpsons game came to Game Boy. Escape from Camp Deadly had Bart trying to make his way out of a dangerous summer camp run by Mr Burns' nephew, Ironfist Burns.

THE SIMPSONS: BARTMAN MEETS RADIOACTIVE MAN

Year 1992
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Imagineering

WHILE UP IN his treehouse reading Radioactive Man comics one night, Bart is stunned when sidekick Fallout Boy appears and asks for Bart's help. It turns out Radioactive Man has been imprisoned in the Limbo Zone, so it's up to Bart (as his Bartman alter-ego) to defeat his deadliest foes – Swamp Hag, Dr Crab and Lava Man – and recover Radioactive Man's stolen super powers. Once he manages to do this, it's on to the final boss fight, where Bartman and the newly-rescued Radioactive Man team up to defeat the evil Brain-O the Magnificent. While it plays similarly to Bart vs the Space Mutants and Bart vs the World, this game's stronger emphasis on pin-point accurate jumping makes it more frustrating than its predecessors. ■

FACT

If you think it's a coincidence that there's also a band called Fall Out Boy, it isn't: the band members have confirmed that it's a direct reference to Radioactive Man's sidekick.

SKATE OR DIE

Year 1988
Publisher Ultra Games / Palcom
Developer Konami

LONG BEFORE TONY Hawk was grinding and flipping in millions of gamers' homes, another game was doing its bit to promote skateboarding culture. Skate or Die was originally released on home computers by Electronic Arts, before Konami took over porting duties for an NES version.

The game takes place on a single street, with a number of roads that conveniently lead off to different skating competitions. In the middle of the street is the skate shop: it's run by 'skateboarding maniac' Rodney Recloose, a purple-mohawked chap with a Marine Corps tattoo. This is where players can sign in to register their name, then decide whether to practice an event or take part in a full competition.

There are five events to choose from. The Freestyle Ramp has you pulling off tricks on a halfpipe to try and score as many points as possible, while the High Jump event uses the same halfpipe but places a large ruler at one side to measure your highest leap. Downhill

FACT

It's not clear whether this is deliberate, but skate shop owner Rodney Recloose looks suspiciously like comedian Rodney Dangerfield. Albeit with a mohawk, of course.

Race consists of a complex course littered with obstacles and other items to trick off: scoring is the name of the game here again but there are multiple routes, meaning you have to figure out the best path to take.

The final two events involve competing against another opponent. Downhill Jam is a race down a long back alley against another skater, with no rules: you can punch and kick your opponent to try and knock them over. Finally, the Joust is a battle where two competitors skate around an empty swimming pool armed with Gladiators-style sticks. ■

SKATE OR DIE 2: THE SEARCH FOR DOUBLE TROUBLE

Year 1990
Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer Electronic Arts

EA DECIDED TO take the Skate or Die licence back off Konami's hands when it came to this NES-only sequel. Ditching the event-based structure, Skate or Die 2 is instead a side-scrolling action game set in the fictional town of Elwood. Your nameless protagonist accidentally ran over the mayor's wife's poodle while out skateboarding one day, so she gets her hubby to outlaw skating and scrap your skate ramp. It's up to you to build a new ramp – the titular Double Trouble – by gathering enough money to pay for a building permit and plans. Along the way you can collect cassette tapes, CDs, tacos and chilli fries: these can be traded with Rodney and his son Lester for new tricks and boards. ■

FACT

Skate or Die 2 is best known for its incredible title screen music by Commodore 64 composing supremo Rob Hubbard. It uses digitised samples of electric guitars to make a truly rocking sound.

SKI OR DIE!

Year 1991
Publisher Ultra Games / Palcom
Developer Konami

PORTING AND PUBLISHING duties returned to Konami for this snowy spin-off of Skate or Die, which returns to the event-based format. The layout here is exactly the same as in the original game, except the street hub is now snowy and Rodney now owns a ski shop, not a skate shop. There are five new events here: Snowboard Halfpipe is a third-person stunt event where you travel down a long halfpipe performing tricks, Innertube Thrash is a downhill race for two competitors riding rubber rings, Acro Aerials has you pulling off tricks off a steep jump, Downhill Blitz is a timed race to the bottom of a hill and Snowball Blast is a survival game where you have to throw snowballs at kids attacking from all angles. ■

FACT

The Snowboard Halfpipe event included text commentary from Rodney's son Lester, who makes odd comments when you crash like 'scarf ice, Frosty' and 'I don't know you or your dog'.

SKY KID

Year 1987
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Namco

A NAMCO SIDE-SCROLLING shoot 'em up in which the player's ship is a biplane. Red Baron and Blue Max are two Sky Kids who've been tasked with a simple mission: fly through various stages while gunning down enemy aircraft, pick up a bomb, fly it to your designated target, drop it then land safely. A special loop-the-loop move lets you avoid enemy attacks, but you can't use it once you get the bomb: this makes the second half of each stage harder. If you take a hit your plane will begin to spiral downwards, but you can salvage it by holding Up and bashing the A and B buttons. The game also supports co-op play, where players can also save their partner by shooting them while they spiral. ■

FACT

Sky Kid has a number of easter eggs that revolve around the looping mechanic. Loop over a billboard and it'll change to a picture of Pac-Man, while looping into the sun will turn it into the moon and turn the stage dark.

SKY SHARK

Year 1989
Publisher Taito
Developer Software Creations

THIS FAIRLY STRAIGHTFORWARD Second World War themed vertical shoot 'em up was originally developed by Toaplan for arcades under the name Flying Shark, before being ported to a host of home computers as well as the NES. Players take control of the Sky Shark, an ace pilot: his squadron has more kills than any other in the war, and he's got the most kills in his squadron. The game consists of five stages which players must fly through, shooting enemy planes, tanks, armed trains and gunboats. The final boss at the end of the fifth stage is a massive plane: destroy it and the game will loop, bringing you back to the second stage so you can continue building your score. ■

FACT

Sky Shark spawned a sequel called Fire Shark. Oddly, it was named Same! Same! Same! in Japan, which is actually a fairly appropriate title given that it's more of the same thing.

SLALOM

Year 1987
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Rare

SLALOM MAY HAVE been generally forgotten over the years, but it's still an important title in gaming history because it marks the first ever Nintendo game developed by Rare, who would eventually grow to become an important partner in the SNES and Nintendo 64 days. Slalom is made up of three mountain ranges – the easy Snowy Hill, moderately tricky Mt Nasty and difficult Steep Peak – each containing eight different downhill courses. The aim is to get to the bottom of each course before time runs out. Skiing outside of the flag markers makes your skier fall over, losing crucial seconds, and the tracks are littered with other distractions including snowmen, sledders and your own skier's off-puttingly toned buttocks. Slalom is part of the Rare Replay compilation on Xbox One. ■

FACT

Nintendo initially refused Rare an NES licence, so it reverse-engineered the NES and made a Slalom demo. Nintendo was so impressed it granted the licence.

SMASH TV

Year 1991
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Beam Software

LOOSELY BASED ON the movie version of *The Running Man*, Smash TV is a top-down twin-stick shooter set on a futuristic game show. Starting on-stage at a TV studio, you are quickly ushered off down a corridor where you take on a series of rooms filled with hordes of enemies. As you gun them down, you also have to collect prizes which randomly appear on the floor: these give extra points and include the likes of 'a brand new VCR' and 'a sleek 1999 Roadster'. Because the NES lacks the dual joysticks of the arcade version, the player's direction is locked when you hold the A button. Brilliantly, there's also a 'two controller' mode, where the player holds two NES controllers vertically and uses both D-Pads as twin sticks. ■

FACT

The arcade version of Smash TV was programmed by Midway's Mark Turmell. Turmell would later become a hidden playable character in NBA Jam.

THE SMURFS

Year 1994
Publisher Infogrames
Developer Bit Managers

BRAINY SMURF, JOKEY Smurf and Smurfette have been kidnapped! Playing as a plain old generic Smurf, you have to head out and rescue them. This is a platform game taking place over ten stages, ranging from the River Smurf to an old gold mine, to a flight on the back of a stork (which is more like a side-scrolling shoot 'em up stage, minus the shooting).

Being a happy chap, your Smurf doesn't have any major attacks, only bouncing on enemies' heads. Along the way you'll end up in a boss fight against Gargamel's cat Azrael, and at the end you'll take on Gargamel in a surprisingly difficult fight involving a catapult. Given that it was one of the last NES games released, it's visually quite impressive despite the system's limitations. ■

FACT

The Smurfs was mostly released in PAL-B regions. The only PAL-A region to get it was Italy, even though the only selectable languages in the game are English, French, German and Spanish.

SNAKE RATTLE N ROLL

Year 1990
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Rare

ONE OF RARE'S more unique NES games, Snake Rattle N Roll tells the story of two snakes – appropriately named Rattle and Roll – who are hankering for a snack. In each of the game's 11 stages are a bunch of tiny creatures called Nibbley Pibbleys, and it just so happens that Rattle and Roll think they're delicious. The more Nibbley Pibbleys the pair eat, the longer their tails will grow and the heavier they'll get. At the end of each stage is a scale: if Rattle or Roll are heavy enough when they get on the scale, the door to the next level will open. It's a clever idea, and one that's pleasingly backed by a generous helping of Elvis-like rock and roll music. ■

FACT

Snake Rattle N Roll got a largely forgotten sequel on the Game Boy called Sneaky Snakes. It followed the same formula but was a side-scrolling platformer instead of an isometric free-roamer.

SNAKE'S REVENGE

Year 1990
Publisher Ultra Games / Konami
Developer Konami

THE 2018 GAME Metal Gear Survive caused a lot of controversy when it became clear that Konami wasn't really capable of making a good Metal Gear game without series creator Hideo Kojima involved. In fairness, anyone who remembers Snake's Revenge – an 'unofficial' Metal Gear sequel that had nothing to do with Kojima – would have already known this.

In it, Solid Snake travels to the Middle Eastern nation of Teristan to stop a terrorist called Higharolla Kockamamie (seriously) from constructing a new Metal Gear. If that name sounds ridiculous, it is: it was a completely fictional character who was dreamt up for a fake plot that was only used on the game's packaging and in its manual. In the actual game your enemy is a cybernetic Big Boss. ■

FACT

At the Game Developers Conference in 2009, Hideo Kojima referred to Snake's Revenge as 'a crap little game, because I wasn't involved in it. It was not so good'.

SNOOPY'S SILLY SPORTS SPECTACULAR

Year 1990
Publisher Kemco
Developer Kemco

IT'S NOT QUITE clear what makes Snoopy a suitable character for a multi-event sports game, but that's what Snoopy's Silly Sports Spectacular is. There are six different sporting events here, taking place over numerous locations in Italy and Greece. The events include a sack race at Mount Vesuvius, boot throwing (similar to the hammer toss) in Rome, a pogo race at the Parthenon, pizza-stacking outside the Leaning Tower of Pisa, a river jump in Naples and an odd battle game in Venice where you have to push your opponent out of a gondola. Why the connection to Italy and Greece? The game is actually a port of a Gremlin Graphics game called Alternative World Games, which Kemoc had been given the licence to release on consoles. ■

FACT

Much like with other Kemco games, Snoopy's Silly Sports Spectacular is based on a completely different licence in Japan. Over there, it starred Donald Duck instead.

SNOW BROTHERS

Year 1991
Publisher Capcom
Developer SOL

PRINCE NICK AND Prince Tom were rulers of Whiteland. One day, while the pair were atop the Crystal Mountains, the evil King Scorch used magic to transform them into snowmen. He then sent his army to take over Whiteland, kidnapping Princesses Teri and Tina for good measure. The newly snowified Nick and Tom, agreeing that being sentient slush shouldn't stop them from fighting back, decide to head out to rescue the princesses. Snow Brothers is similar to Bubble Bobble, in that it takes place over a series of small self-contained stages, and your character has the ability to fire a projectile which incapacitates your enemies: in this case, trapping them in snowballs. Once you do this, you can roll the snowballs into other enemies to defeat them. ■

FACT

Snow Brothers was originally an arcade game developed by Toaplan. Its sequel, Snow Bros. 2: With New Elves, was the last game Toaplan made because it went bankrupt shortly after it was released.

SOCCER

Year 1987
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo / Intelligent Systems

OF THE VARIOUS sports titles making up part of the NES's original 'black box' series, Soccer is the one that probably holds up best today. There are seven teams in the game – the United States, Great Britain, France, West Germany, Brazil, Japan and Spain – and matches are six-a-side affairs, due to the limitations of early NES games. The controls are basic, with B passing and A shooting, but the shot mechanic is interesting in that there's a small arrow sitting behind each goal. The player can move the arrow with the D-Pad before pressing A: when they do, the shot will be hit in that direction. This makes for some surprisingly accurate shots, leading to goals that are oddly satisfying to score even more than three decades later. ■

FACT

In the December 1988 issue of *CVG* magazine, Julian Rignall (writer of this very book's foreword) reviewed Soccer, saying: 'Nintendo Soccer is one of the best simulations of the sport, and shouldn't be left on the subs bench.'

SOLAR JETMAN: HUNT FOR THE GOLDEN WARPSHIP

Year 1990
Publisher Tradewest
Developer Zippo Games / Rare

WHEN RARE DEVELOPED home computer games under the name of Ultimate Play the Game, two of its most popular creations were Jetpac and its sequel Lunar Jetman. Solar Jetman is the third game in the series, and was handled by Manchester studio Zippo Games under Rare's watchful eye. The hero, Jetman, has to guide his small Jetpod around 12 planets in search of pieces of the Golden Warpship, a powerful spacecraft. Like its predecessors, the game has a heavy focus on inertia, and each planet's different gravitational pull plays a large part in controlling how your ship moves. This means expert control of your Jetpod's thrusters is a must. The European version of the game says 'Warship' on the box by mistake. ■

FACT

Solar Jetman was initially an original title by Zippo called Iota. After Rare bought it over, it asked for the name to be changed so it would fit into the Jetpac series.

SOLOMON'S KEY

Year 1987
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo

THERE ONCE EXISTED a magical book called *Solomon's Key*, written by a great magician called Solomon. The 'key' is a magical formula which traps demons in a hidden dimension. One day a taoist monk discovers the book and opens it, freeing the demons and plunging the world into darkness. Step forward Dana, a young wizard who enters the hidden dimension to try and restore order. Solomon's Key is a puzzle platformer where the player can only do five things: walk, jump, create blocks, destroy blocks and create fireballs. These five abilities must be combined to solve 64 increasingly complex stages (including 16 hidden ones), which is no mean feat: the game is widely believed to be one of the most difficult on the NES. ■

FACT

The Game Over screen features a 'GDV' number. This stands for 'Game Deviation Value' and is a rating that starts at 47 and builds depending on things like points scored and fairies collected.

SOLSTICE: THE QUEST FOR THE STAFF OF DEMNOS

Year 1990
Publisher CSG Imagesoft / Nintendo
Developer Software Creations

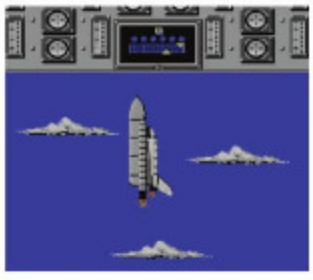
THE ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE genre was popularised on the ZX Spectrum with games like Knight Lore (developed by Ultimate Play the Game, before it became Rare). Solstice is an NES adventure taking clear inspiration from these games, offering the same perspective and block-based rooms. You play as Shadax, a wizard who spots the evil Morbius the Malevolent kidnapping Eleanor, Princess of Arcade and decides to put a stop to it. Morbius can only be defeated with an ancient weapon called the Staff of Demnos, so you have to find all six pieces and rebuild it. There are a total of 252 rooms in Solstice, many of which contain puzzles that need to be solved in order to gain items useful elsewhere in the game. ■

FACT

Solstice received a SNES sequel in 1993. Equinox stars Shadax's son Glendaal as he tries to rescue his dad from his traitorous apprentice Sonia.

SPACE SHUTTLE PROJECT

Year 1991
Publisher Absolute Entertainment
Developer Imagineering



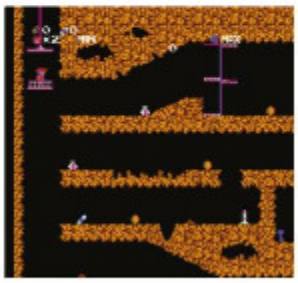
IF YOU'VE EVER wondered what it takes to fly one of NASA's Space Shuttles, this NES recreation reveals all. Well, not really, because what you actually have here is a series of mini-games which mostly amount to a bunch of reaction-based quick time events. There are six missions in total: launching a surveillance satellite, retrieving and relaunching the shuttle, rescuing a missing Soviet cosmonaut and three separate phases of building the International Space Station. Each is split into four smaller stages, some of which consist of matching an arrow on the screen or pressing a button at the right time. It looks great and the music is wonderful but it's probably fair to say that the level of player interaction is slightly lacking. ■

FACT

The game manual includes a mail-in promotion that lets you send away $3 for a sachet of freeze-dried 'astronaut ice cream'.

SPELUNKER

Year 1987
Publisher Broderbund
Developer Tamtex / Tose



FOR THOSE NOT in the know, spelunking is the act of exploring wild, uncharted cave systems. Spelunker gives you the opportunity to do just that, putting you in the shoes and miner's hat of a nameless explorer as you search for the rumoured legendary pyramid which is said to lie deep within the caves and apparently holds riches beyond your wildest dreams. You can use ropes, ladders and dynamite to help make your way through the caves, though you'll also have to contend with the ghosts and bats that are roaming around. Although your hero is clearly the adventurous type, he's a bit delicate: even very slight falls will instantly kill him, meaning you'll need to explore the caves with extreme caution. ■

FACT

There have been a number of sequels to Spelunker over the years. Spelunker HD was released on the PS3 in 2009, while Square Enix developed Spelunker World for PS4 and PS Vita in 2015, and Spelunker Party! for Switch in 2017.

SPIDER-MAN: RETURN OF THE SINISTER SIX

Year 1992
Publisher LJN
Developer Bits Studios

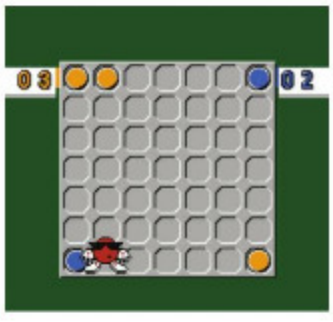
THE ONLY SPIDER-MAN game on the NES is also one of the most difficult superhero games ever made, mainly due to the fact it only gives you a single life. Doctor Octopus has decided that enough is enough and it's time to give world domination a go. He enlists the help of the rest of the Sinister Six to keep Spidey busy, so it's up to the one-lifed webslinger to take them out. Once you've fought and defeated Electro, the Sandman, Mysterio, the Vulture and Hobgolin, you finally get to face off against Doc Ock and smack those ideas of megalomania out of his head. Although you only have one life, you can at least restore health by killing enemies (literally: most explode into pieces). ■

FACT

Return of the Sinister Six was originally a six-part story that took place in *The Amazing Spider-Man* issues 334–339. The game is loosely based on that story arc.

SPOT: THE VIDEO GAME

Year 1990
Publisher Arcadia Systems
Developer Virgin Mastertronic



MOST GAMERS KNOW Spot from the brilliant 16-bit platformer Cool Spot, but the former 7 Up mascot starred in another, very different game before that. Spot: The Video Game is a multiplayer puzzle game that takes place on a 7x7 grid. Up to four players can take part, each with their own colour of Spot. Starting with a single Spot, you can either choose an adjacent square to create a new Spot, or choose a further away square to move an existing Spot. Land a Spot next to your opponents and their colour changes to yours. The aim is to dominate the board with Spots of your colour. What should be a fairly boring game is at least livened up by the wide variety of animations when you move a Spot. ■

FACT

Spot is still technically the 7 Up mascot, though he tends to keep a low profile these days. In case you weren't aware, he's supposed to be the red dot on the 7 Up logo.

SPY HUNTER

Year 1987
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft

FOR MANY, THE best bits in James Bond movies are the car chases. Spy Hunter acknowledges this by offering nothing but high-speed racing goodness. Playing as an unnamed spy, you have to drive your G-6155 Interceptor car as far as you can through an endless road, using your machine guns to take down enemy cars along the way. Every time you enter a new territory you can call for a weapons van by pressing the Start button. When it arrives you can drive into the back of it to equip your car with oil slicks, missiles and smoke bombs. Even better, you can transform your car into a speedboat if you're lucky enough to see and drive into one of the boathouses that appear on rare occasions. ■

FACT

The popular toys-to-life game Lego Dimensions has a Midway Retro Gamer pack. Players who buy it will be able to build a Lego version of the G-6155 Interceptor.

SPY VS SPY

Year 1988
Publisher Kemco
Developer First Star Software

THIS TWO-PLAYER COMPETITIVE game is based on the *MAD* Magazine characters, who are always trying to kill each other with ridiculously elaborate traps. Both spies are in an embassy, armed with a briefcase. The aim is to search each room for a passport, bag of money, key and secret papers, put them all in your briefcase then leave the embassy through the only exit. The trick is, each player can lay booby traps, which can make their foe drop their belongings. This can lead to some truly cruel moments: one common strategy is to rig the exit door with a bucket of water and wait for your opponent to try to finish. That said, you can collect items (like an umbrella) to protect you from some attacks. ■

FACT

Spy vs Spy's split-screen gameplay is explained in the manual as a special gimmick called Simulplay. 'With the clock running, we didn't think it was fair to make players wait to take turns,' it says. 'So, voila! Simulplay.'

SQOON

Year 1987
Publisher Irem
Developer Home Data

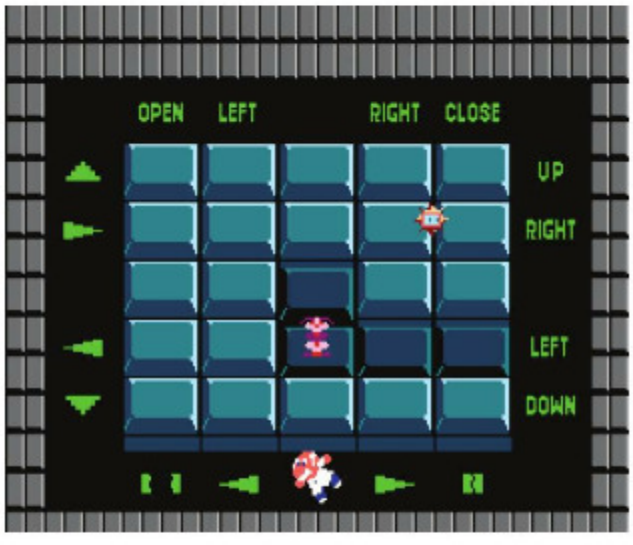
THE NEPTUNIANS ARE an underwater race of aliens who decide they quite fancy living in Earth. They invade the planet and get to work melting the polar ice caps, while capturing humans for food. You play as an evil pirate called Narikeen who decides to use his submarine Sqoon to save the day so he can become a hero (and also so the port can open again and he can trade his recent haul of treasure for grog). Sqoon must bomb the Neptunians' underwater bases and rescue the humans trapped there, then head up to the surface and deliver them to a waiting ship. Your fuel is strictly limited and runs out after 60 seconds, so you have to keep topping it up by collecting the fuel capsules the ship sends down. ■

FACT

The manual paints a disturbingly bleak picture of the whole 'humans for food' situation. It details how back on Neptune, the aliens have 'man-ham livestock' they raise like cattle.

STACK-UP

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1



SINCE EVERY NES Deluxe Set that came with the R.O.B. robot also came bundled with a copy of Gyromite, this gives Stack-Up the dubious honour of being the only standalone game designed for the doomed peripheral. It's a beast of a game, too: because it comes with special accessories for R.O.B., the box is actually twice as thick as a standard NES game.

Inside the box are five plastic platforms and five large coloured discs. The platforms are attached to R.O.B.'s base and go around him, while the discs sit on each platform.

The game itself stars Professor Hector, the star of Gyromite, as he sends commands to R.O.B. to pick up and move the discs to different platforms, stacking them on top of others if need be. The aim is to move the blocks around to recreate a pattern shown on the screen in as few moves as possible. This is done with six actions you can ask R.O.B. to perform: turn left, turn right, move his arms up, move them down, close his hands together (to grab the discs) and move his hands apart (to let them go).

There are a couple of extra modes designed to mix things up a bit. The most interesting is Bingo, where each command is allocated a row or column on a grid. You activate the command by triggering every square in that row or column, but there are also enemies roaming the screen who can trigger them too and mess up your plans. ■

FACT

The western version of Stack-Up is pretty much unchanged from the Japanese one. The title screen doesn't even say Stack-Up: it says Robot Block (the game's Japanese name).

STADIUM EVENTS

Year 1987
Publisher Bandai
Developer Human Entertainment

ALTHOUGH ATHLETIC WORLD was the first game released for the Family Fitness Mat (later renamed the Power Pad), Stadium Events is far more widely known for reasons that will become clear. The game itself is entertaining enough: it offers four different sporting events – the 100m dash, 110m hurdles, long jump and triple jump – all of which are played using the mat accessory.

Here's where things get interesting. As discussed in the entry for Athletic World, Nintendo decided it liked Bandai's Family Fitness Mat so much it asked to rebrand it as the Power Pad. This deal kicked in right after Stadium Events was released, and so copies of the game were quickly pulled from shelves to prepare for the rebranding.

FACT

In 2016, ESPN published an article about Stadium Events in which former Nintendo spokesperson Howard Phillips says around 10,000 copies were produced, and that he has no idea where they all went.

The newly Nintendo-fied Power Pad came with a renamed version of Stadium Events, now known as World Class Track Meet. It's a common game and can be found fairly easily these days. The same can't be said for

Stadium Events, though: it's not clear how many copies actually made it to store shelves before it was pulled, but it's widely agreed that the number is extremely low.

As a result, it's generally considered the rarest NES game ever made. A new, sealed copy once sold for an incredible $35,100. If you get curious and decide to look, don't be fooled by cheap versions: in Europe it kept its Stadium Events name and so copies there are fairly common. Only the North American version is rare, so if it seems too good to be true, it is. ■

STANLEY: THE SEARCH FOR DR LIVINGSTON

Year 1992
Publisher Electro Brain
Developer Sculptured Software

'DOCTOR LIVINGSTONE, I presume?' These were the famous words uttered by Sir Henry Morton Stanley, the famous nineteenth century journalist and explorer who searched central Africa for the missionary David Livingstone. This NES take on the real-life incident is a platform adventure in which you play as Stanley himself, armed with a little gyrocopter to help him survive long falls. On your quest to find Dr Livingston – the game spells his name without an 'e' for some reason – you'll find that the jungle is crawling with soldiers, cobras, vipers, giant spiders, wild cats and all manner of other beasties hell-bent on attacking you. Luckily you can collect a variety of weapons, from a machete and rocks to a blow gun and spears. ■

FACT

To be fair, Stanley's real life adventure didn't sound much easier. During his 700-mile expedition, his horse died after just a few days and his porters all either died of tropical diseases or ran off.

STAR FORCE

Year 1987
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo

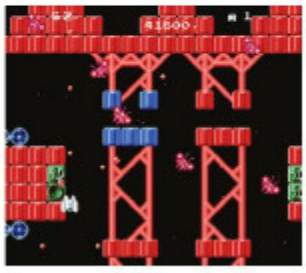
SOME AMERICAN GAMERS may know this game better as Mega Force, which was the name it went by in arcades and on other formats. For the NES version, Tecmo decided to revert back to its original Japanese name Star Force. It's a vertical scrolling shooter set in the distant future (the year 2010), where you're a soldier piloting a shop called the Final Star on a mission to destroy the evil planet Gordess, whose citizens are murdering and plundering their way through the galaxy. Players have to shoot their way through 24 stages, accompanied by oddly cheery music that doesn't really suit the tone of the game. Hidden somewhere deep in the game is a special Cleopatra head: if you can find it, you'll get a cool million points. ■

FACT

When you beat the game a message from Tecmo appears, telling you that Super Star Force is coming soon. In reality, the sequel was only released in Japan.

STAR SOLDIER

Year 1989
Publisher Taxan
Developer Hudson Soft



THE FIRST IN a series of shoot 'em ups developed by Hudson Soft, Star Soldier was originally inspired by Star Force (which Hudson published in Japan and featured in its annual 'Caravan Festival' events). It's a similar type of game, then, with you piloting the fighter ship Caesar as you try to destroy Starbrain, a giant computer programmed to destroy the galaxy. There are 16 stages in total, each filled with air and ground enemies trying to blow you into tiny pieces. Each stage ends with a boss fight against either Starbrain or a larger version, helpfully named Big Starbrain. One of the odder inclusions is the 'trap zone', a section where you fly under the scenery. Enemies can't hit you here, but you can't hit them either. ■

FACT

Hudson's Caravan Festivals often had competitions where players had to get the highest score in 5 or 10 minutes. Some retro-inspired games now have a 'Caravan mode' inspired by this.

STAR TREK: 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Year 1992
Publisher Ultra Games / Konami
Developer Interplay

IN THIS NES tribute to a quarter-century of *Star Trek*, Kirk and his crew have been thrown into the heart of uncharted space by a mysterious hole in space-time near the planet Sigma Iotia II. The crew have to land on an unknown planet and grab some dilithium crystals to help power the *Enterprise* and get it back to the tear so they can investigate. Part action game, part story-based adventure, you control Kirk and two other crew members of your choosing as they explore numerous alien worlds, solving puzzles and getting in various conflicts. At the end Spock explains that 'in every situation there are factors which are out of our control,' causing Kirk to ask: 'Are you saying that we are merely characters in a game?' ■

FACT

One area set in a temple has a puzzle where you have to step on symbols in the right order to advance. Four of these symbols are from the *Led Zeppelin IV* album cover.

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION

Year 1993
Publisher Absolute Entertainment
Developer Absolute Entertainment

IF YOU'VE EVER fancied being a captain on the USS *Enterprise-D*, this NES offering could be for you. Rather than putting you in control of one of The Next Generation's crew members, you instead play as a young cadet at Starfleet Academy. Taking part in a simulation exercise, you assume the role of acting captain and have to deal with a number of different situations that arise. To do this, you can talk to five different crew members on the bridge – Worf, Data, LaForge, O'Brien and Riker – each of whom can perform a different function. Starting off as an ensign, your rank increases to lieutenant, lieutenant commander, commander and finally captain as you take on and successfully complete missions. ■

FACT

At any time on any mission, a 'red alert scenario' can start. This will involve either a temporal rift, an intruder on the ship or a life support systems failure, and you have to deal with them quickly.

STAR VOYAGER

Year 1987
Publisher Acclaim
Developer ASCII Entertainment

THE LAST SURVIVORS of your civilisation are travelling through space in a transport ship called the *CosmoStation Noah*. Suddenly, they're surrounded by evil Molok Wardrivers. Escaping in a small ship, you have to find and destroy the enemies to save your fellow survivors. Star Voyager is played through a first-person viewpoint as you navigate your ship through space.

The game consists of two main screens: the information screen and the flying screen. The former lets you plan your warp paths and turn on your barrier shields, while the latter is where you battle enemies and, when possible, warp to different areas of the galaxy. You only have a limited supply of fuel crystals, so you need to regularly find and visit space stations to replenish your fuel. ■

FACT

There's a massive weapon hidden in the game called the Star Bomb. It can do enormous damage, but there are two catches: there's only one in the whole game, and you need two controllers to activate it.

STAR WARS

Year 1991
Publisher JVC
Developer Beam Software / Lucasfilm Games

WHEN IT COMES to blockbuster movies they don't get much bigger than *Star Wars*, so naturally it's had more video games dedicated to it than any other movie franchise. Practically every major video video game system over the years has had at least one *Star Wars* game and the NES was no different, getting two of them.

The first is the better offering, covering the events from the original 1977 movie. Playing as Luke Skywalker (and later as Princess Leia and Han Solo), you get to make your way through a variety of stages based on locations from the film.

FACT

Japan got a completely different Star Wars game by Namco. It's a little looser with the details: Luke has dark hair, and Darth Vader has a clone that can turn into a scorpion.

The majority of these are side-scrolling platforming sections in which you explore the likes of Tatooine and its various caves, the inside of a sandcrawler, the Mos Eisley Cantina, the Death Star cell block, the trash compactor and the Death Star Hangar. There are a couple

of other stages, however, where the action switches to a different viewpoint. The Tatooine sections are separated by a top-down section where you fly around in a Landspeeder, while an Asteroid Belt stage halfway through the game and a couple of Death Star stages near the end put you behind the controls of the *Millennium Falcon* and an X-Wing from a first-person perspective. Finally, the game switches back to a top-down vertical scroller as you fly down the Death Star trench to drop a bomb into its exhaust port. A difficult game which was notorious for its floaty controls, but one that was generally well received regardless. ■

STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

Year 1992
Publisher JVC
Developer Sculptured Software / Lucasfilm Games

THE SECOND NES *Star Wars* game was handed over to Sculptured Software, and the results were generally agreed to be less impressive. This time you play only as Luke as you play through a series of locations from *The Empire Strikes Back*, including Hoth, Dagobah and Cloud City. Luke can now select between seven different Force powers, like higher jumping, faster running, deflecting enemy shots and levitation, and there are now sections where you get to control a Snowspeeder, a Tauntaun and an AT-ST Walker. Despite these additions, the extremely twitchy animations make controlling the game a frustrating experience for many. Oddly, whereas the film ends with Luke jumping to his doom, you beat the game by knocking Darth Vader off a railing and onto spikes. ■

FACT

There was never a *Return of the Jedi* game planned for the NES, because The Empire Strikes Back came so late in the system's life. Instead, Sculptured Software and Lucasfilm Games moved onto the SNES to make the much better Super Star Wars.

STARSHIP HECTOR

Year 1990
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Hudson Soft

IN THE YEAR 2038, World War IV takes place and destroys all of mankind while Starship *Hector* is thousands of light years away on an exploratory mission. When it returns, it finds Earth in ruins and populated by evil bio-mechanical creatures. Earth's pretty much doomed anyway, so you might as well shoot them all. Starship Hector is a spiritual successor to Star Soldier, but it plays more like Namco's Xevious because you have two types of shot: a laser for air enemies and bombs for ground enemies. There are also now side-scrolling stages, to mix things up a bit. Continuing Hudson's 'Caravan Mode' theme, the title screen offers separate '2 minute' and '5 minute' play modes, giving you a set time to get the highest score possible. ■

FACT

When you beat the final boss (a massive brain with an eyeball), you're told 'the Earth is saved'. It's not quite clear how, given that all of humanity is dead, but you might as well take their word for it.

STARTROPICS

Year 1990
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D3

STARTROPICS IS THAT rarest of beasts, a game that was developed in-house at Nintendo but was never released in Japan. It was an RPG designed purely for the western market, and was written and directed by Punch-Out!! creator Genyo Takeda.

It tells the story of a young lad called Mike Jones, who lives in Seattle (where Nintendo of America is based, conveniently). His Uncle Steve – or Doctor Jones to you – is a famous archaeologist who's looking for lost ruins in the Coral Sea. Although Mike has never met his uncle, one day he gets a letter from him inviting him to stay with him at his island laboratory. When he gets there, he finds out that his uncle has been abducted.

StarTropics is a competent top-down RPG split into eight chapters, with well-written dialogue and plenty of characters to meet and help out. It's most fondly remembered, however, for featuring one of the coolest gimmicks in gaming. The game comes bundled with a replica of the letter Mike gets from his uncle. At one point in your adventure Mike gets stuck on a desert island with his uncle's former assistant and a submarine that won't work without a secret code. Suddenly the assistant channels his uncle and says 'Tell Mike to dip my letter in water'. By dipping the actual physical letter into a bowl of water, a hidden message appears, telling you the code for the submarine: 747. It was probably done to prevent rentals or second-hand sales, but was cool nonetheless. ■

FACT

When StarTropics was released on the Wii Virtual Console, players wondered how the letter trick would work. The game's digital manual has a page showing the letter: when you press a button an animation plays showing it being dipped in water.

STEALTH ATF

Year 1989
Publisher Activision / Nintendo
Developer Imagineering

ALTHOUGH THIS ACTIVISION flight sim has eight missions, they all essentially boil down to one rule: blow the hell out of anything else that's in the sky. These missions send you to the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Libya, the Bering Strait, Central America, the Persian Gulf, the Kola Peninsula and Southeast Asia, as you're tasked with destroying increasing numbers of enemy ships in your Stealth ATF (Advanced Tactical Fighter), which is based on the Lockheed F-117 Nighthawk.

Unlike some other NES flight sims, each mission here starts with a take-off mini-game in which you have to actually get your plane up into the sky before you can start worrying about shooting others out of it. After the eighth mission ends, the game loops on a harder difficulty. ■

FACT

Stealth ATF was the first of 14 NES games developed by Imagineering. Others included both Home Alone games and all three Simpsons games.

STINGER

Year 1987
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

AS WELL AS its more serious space-themed shoot 'em ups, Konami also created a more colourful shooter series called Twinbee. Stinger is the second game, known as Moero Twinbee: Cinnamon-hakase o Sukue! in Japan but renamed for North America. Players fly the Twinbee ship as they try to rescue Professor Cinnamon from evil alien bandits from the planet Attackon. There's also the option to play co-operatively, with Player 2 getting to control the green ship GwinBee. Of course though, given the western version's branding, both ships are known simply as Stingers here. While other shooters of the era tended to remove all your power-ups when you died, here a ghost floats up instead. If you can grab the ghost during your next life, you'll get the power-ups back. ■

FACT

The Stinger manual explains that the reason Professor Cinnamon is being kidnapped is so the aliens can turn the world into cotton candy. Which doesn't sound that bad, really.

STREET COP

Year 1989
Publisher Bandai
Developer Human Entertainment

BEING A POLICE officer can be tiring work, what with all the criminals you have to chase down the street. Bandai's Street Cop proves this by making you taking part in physical activity to play it. Supporting the Power Pad fitness mat – the side with numbers 1 to 12 on it – Street Cop has you running on the 6 and 7 circles as quickly as you can to increase the running speed of Little Ben, a rookie cop who dreams of cleaning up the streets. Other actions like ducking, turning and using items can also be performed by placing your feet or hands on different circles: this includes using your baton and pistol, but you can also choose to use the NES controller's A and B buttons for this. ■

FACT

There are six major criminals to catch in Street Cop, from purse thief Snatcher Joe to female gang member Bloody Betty. The final crook is mafia boss Don Mayonecheese.

STREET FIGHTER 2010: THE FINAL FIGHT

Year 1990
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

IT WAS A bold move from Capcom to put both Street Fighter and Final Fight in one title, then deliver a game that plays absolutely nothing like either of its classic fighters. Instead, this is a futuristic platformer in which you play as Ken, two decades after he wins the Street Fighter tournament. After returning home Ken studied Cybotics at university and developed a substance called Cyboplasm, which makes people stronger, but one day strange beings kill his lab partner Troy and steal the Cyboplasm. Armed with bionic implants and an interdimensional transporter, you have to fight through 19 action platformer stages, travelling between various planets (don't ask) before discovering a horrible secret about Troy that you'll probably see coming, to be fair. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of Street Fighter 2010 doesn't even star Ken. In that, the hero is an intergalactic police officer called Kevin instead.

STRIDER

Year 1989
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

IN THE LATE '80s Capcom teamed up with manga studio Moto Kikaku to create a three-part project called Strider. This would consist of a serialised manga series and two different games, an action platformer for arcades and a platform adventure for the NES. Although the NES game never made it to Japan, it was localised for North America anyway. Following the plot of the manga, players control a Strider (a high-tech ninja) called Hiryu as he tries to uncover a conspiracy within the Strider organisation. The aim is to travel to countries like Egypt, China and Australia in search of data disks, as well as friends who can grant you new abilities. The result is a much less linear adventure than the arcade game. ■

FACT

Strider Hiryu enjoys a cult following to this day. As well as appearing in a couple of sequels over the years, he's also been a playable character in numerous Capcom crossover fighting games.

SUPER C

Year 1990
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

CONTRA WAS A global hit both in arcades and on home consoles, so Konami released a sequel called Super Contra in 1988. Super C is the NES version of that, with a few extra stages added for good measure. It takes place one year after the first game, and has heroes Bill and Lance heading out to a military base called Fort Fire Storm, where the soldiers there have been brainwashed by the alien warmonger Red Falcon. Super C ditches the third-person sections from Contra and replaces them with top-down vertically-scrolling sections which offer better freedom of movement. Much like the first game was renamed Probotector in Europe, Super C was rebranded Probotector II: Return of the Evil Forces and replaced the human heroes with robots again. ■

FACT

The Konami code doesn't work in Super C, despite Contra being the game that made it most famous. Instead, players have to enter Right, Left, Down, Up, A, B, Start to get 10 lives (30 in the EU version).

SUPER CARS

Year 1991
Publisher Electro Brain
Developer Gremlin Graphics

THIS TOP-DOWN RACER was heavily inspired by Atari's Super Sprint. Whereas that game showed the entire track on-screen, however, Super Cars instead opts for a zoomed-in approach with the screen scrolling to follow your car. There are nine playable tracks, on which you race against three other CPU-controlled opponents. The aim is to at least finish in the top three to move on to the next race. Unlike other games of its ilk, Super Cars has damage meters for your tires, engine, fuel and body: if any run out your car is destroyed. One feature in other versions of the game that was removed from the NES one was showroom haggling: when buying a new car you could choose things to say to the salesman that would raise or lower the price. ■

FACT

The game's three cars are based on real-life ones. The Taraco Neoroader is an Alfa Romeo SZ, the Vaug Interceptor is a Honda NSX and the Retron Parsec Turbo is a Cizeta V16T.

SUPER DODGE BALL

Year 1989
Publisher CSG Imagesoft
Developer Technos Japan

ANOTHER WESTERN PORT of one of Technos' Kunio-kun games, Super Dodge Ball tells the story of a newly formed US Dodgeball Team who want to become world champions. Standing in their way, though, are the awesome Team USSR, who have been undefeated for a decade. The game's main mode is World Cup Play, where you take on a series of opponents from around the world, each with their own unique venues (Team England, for example, play in front of Tower Bridge with suspiciously Beatles-esque music playing). As well as a two-player exhibition mode where you can play as any of the eight teams there's also a Bean Ball mode, where all six Team USA members stand in an open field and try to hit each other with the ball. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of Super Dodge Ball swaps some of the teams around. Team USSR is the semi-final team instead of Team Japan, and the final team to beat is Team USA.

SUPER GLOVE BALL

Year 1990
Publisher Mattel
Developer Rare

ALTHOUGH IT WOULD be another 16 years until Nintendo made motion controls mainstream with the Wii Remote, back in 1990 Mattel's Power Glove peripheral attempted it on the NES with disappointing results. Two games were made specifically with the Power Glove in mind: Bad Street Brawler and this Rare-developed title. It's a third-person 3D take on block-breaking games like Breakout and Arkanoid in which you control a floating glove. The aim is to catch and throw balls against the back and side walls, ceiling and floor to destroy all the tiles on the them. Some walls lead to another stage when they're cleared, but one level can have multiple walls with different exits, meaning the game becomes something of a maze. It can be played with a normal NES controller too. ■

FACT

There were three more games announced for the Power Glove: a flying game called Glove Pilot, a point-and-click puzzler called Techtown, and the mysteriously named Manipulator Glove Adventure. None were released.

SUPER JEOPARDY!

Year 1991
Publisher GameTek
Developer GameTek

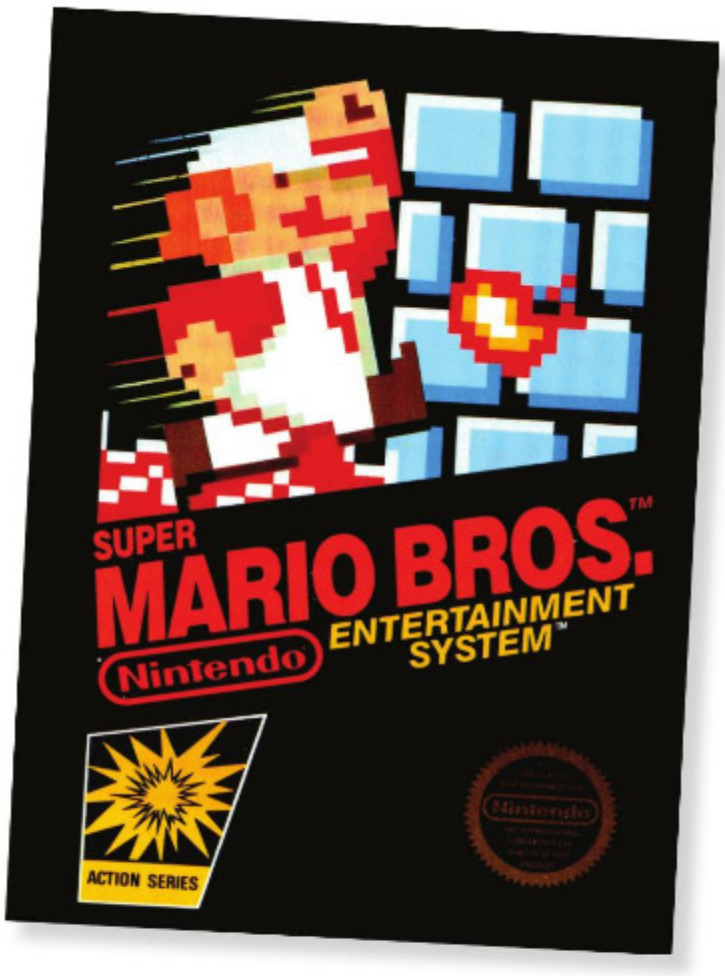
AS LISTED EARLIER in this book, Rare developed three *Jeopardy!* games for GameTek between 1988 and 1990. GameTek took over the following year for the fourth and final entry, this time featuring a completely revamped art style with odd caricature-style contestants. There are around 2,100 questions this time around, with categories ranging from straightforward offerings like The Confederacy, Streisand Films and Simon & Garfunkel, to more obscure titles like Gobbledygook, Passing The Buck and Czech Please. Once you're done with the Jeopardy! and Double Jeopardy! rounds, there are 35 potential Final Jeopardy! questions for you to take on. *Super Jeopardy!* was an actual 13-week special on TV which featured four contestants rather than three. That's the case here, and the game supports four-player adapters. ■

FACT

Here's an out-of-date sample question: 'By weight of total catch, the world's leading fishing nation.' The answer was 'What is Japan?', though if you played it today it would be China.

SUPER MARIO BROS.

Year	1985
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D4



SUPER MARIO BROS. was not the first ever platform game. It wasn't even the first side-scrolling platformer, as some claim (Pac-Land did it a year earlier). What it was, however, was one of the most groundbreaking, influential works in the history of the video game industry, and quite possibly the game that practically single-handedly undid the damage caused by the Atari video game crash.

The basic story is drilled into everyone's head now – partly because it's been replicated and imitated so many times over the decades – but the details have been forgotten over time. The peaceful Mushroom Kingdom has been invaded by the Koopa, a 'tribe of turtles famous for their black magic'. The evil Bowser, king of the Koopa, has captured Princess Toadstool and turned the Mushroom People into stones, bricks and plants. The hero, Mario, hears about the Mushroom People's struggle and heads there to save the day.

Looking at Super Mario Bros. with fresh eyes today is like watching Citizen Kane or listening to a Beatles album. At face value it doesn't seem like it does anything special, much like giving the White Album to a teenager today would probably result in nonchalance. Like those other classics of their respective mediums, the reason Super Mario Bros. feels like so many video games today is because it was the game that – above all others – created the playbook, the bible by which other games would be created.

Jumping on enemies' heads to kill them. Hitting blocks with your head. Power-ups that give you an extra 'hit' before dying. Collecting 100 objects for an extra life. Some of these elements may have seen before, but Super Mario Bros. refined and perfected the art, bringing them all together for a game that remains near-flawless more than a full three decades later.

FACT

Because NES cartridges had smaller storage in the early days, Miyamoto and Tezuka had to come up with clever ways to make the most of Super Mario Bros.'s 32KB of space. Colour changes were one way: Mario and Luigi are identical sprites with swapped colours. But look at the clouds and bushes in the screenshot.

It's telling that many of the philosophies that made Super Mario Bros. so incredible are still put into practice at Nintendo to this day. Designers Shigeru Miyamoto and Takashi Tezuka were masters of second-guessing the player, not only in how they were supposed to play the game – World 1–1 is a masterpiece in forcing players to learn the mechanics while making them think they're discovering them for themselves – but in how they weren't. The pair realised that human nature meant players would try to break the game if given the chance, and so the game rewarded them for thinking outside the box: or the stage, in this case. Anyone cheeky enough to try getting onto the roof of World 1–2 and use it to skip the exit pipe at the end was met with the realisation that not only was it possible, it led to a secret Warp Zone: the developers knew they were coming and prepared a reward. Fast forward to 2017 and games like Super Mario Odyssey continue this ethos, packing each stage with hidden collectibles and encouraging players to think 'I wonder if I can…' before realising that, yes, they can. Super Mario Bros. wasn't the first platform game, but it was the first to let players decide: 'I can.' ■

SUPER MARIO BROS. 2

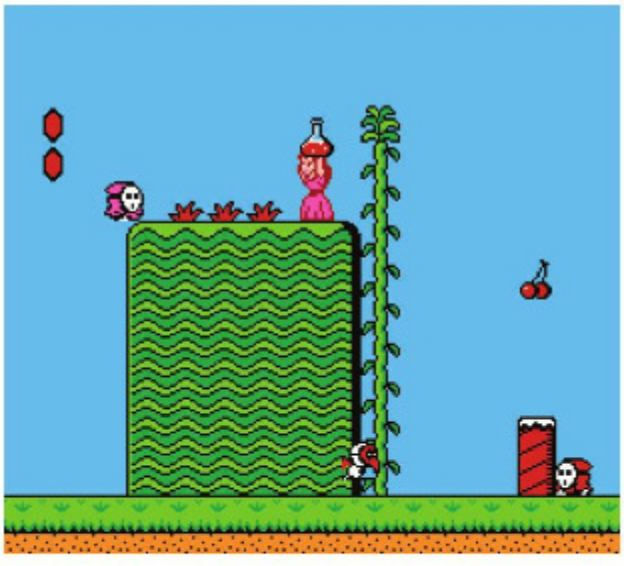
Year	1988
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D4

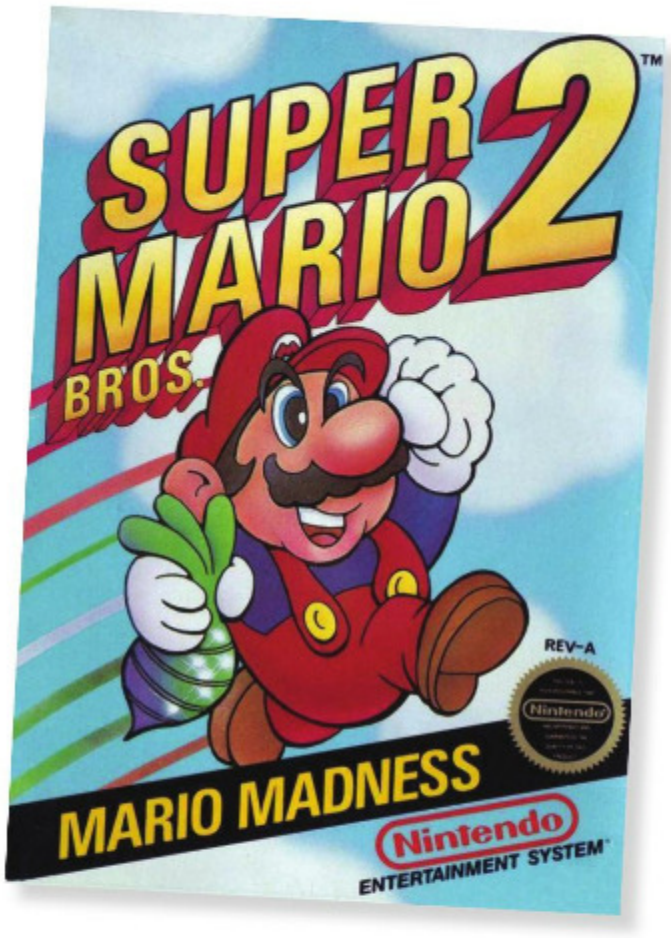
THE ORIGINAL SUPER Mario Bros. 2, released only in Japan, was a straight sequel to the first game with a near-identical look and greatly increased difficulty. By the time the west was ready for a Mario sequel, Nintendo of America decided that not only was it perhaps a bit too hard for western audiences, it didn't look 'new' enough either. Bear in mind that by this point Super Mario Bros. was three years old: NES developers had continued to make huge leaps and bounds and players had since enjoyed the likes of Metroid, The Legend of Zelda, Kid Icarus, Mega Man and Contra.

It was decided, then, that the west would get a different Super Mario Bros. 2, one based on another Shigeru Miyamoto creation called Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic (which was originally a collaboration with Fuji Television). This game has an Arabian theme, with environments and enemies that looked nothing like those in the Mushroom Kingdom, but Nintendo got around it with the classic 'it's all a dream' excuse.

The Mario-fied version of Doki Doki Panic opens with Mario dreaming about finding a magical red door. The door leads to Subcon, the land of dreams, which has been taken over by the evil frog-like creature Wart. The next day, Mario and chums are having a picnic when they discover the same red door. Realising that Subcon is real, they decide to save the day.

Since Super Mario Bros. 2 wasn't originally based on the first game, there are completely different rules at play here. There are no blocks to break, and jumping on enemies doesn't hurt them. The central mechanic is now the ability to pick things up and throw them using the B button: be that enemies, vegetables rooted into the ground, or other items like POW blocks, keys or magic potions.





While it technically wasn't a 'proper' Mario game, Super Mario Bros. 2 still introduced concepts to the series that have remained to this day. Enemies like Birdo and Shy Guy, originally designed for Doki Doki Panic, became popular enough to be considered part of the main Mario roster and regularly appear in other Mario games. The heroes' characteristics started to take form here too: while Luigi was just an identical clone of Mario with different coloured overalls in the first game, this marked the first time he was physically taller. His higher jump and more slippery running controls also made their debut here, as did Princess Peach's floating ability (although she was still Princess Toadstool at this point).

Eventually, both the east and west got to enjoy each other's Mario sequels. The Japanese version was included in the SNES compilation Super Mario All-Stars under the new name Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels, while the western version made it to Japan as Super Mario USA, establishing it in the series' canon. It may be the black sheep of the Super Mario Bros. series, but Super Mario Bros. 2 is still a fantastic game in its own right. ■

FACT

The game's ending sequence shows all the enemies along with their names. There's a mistake, though: Birdo and Ostro (a large ostrich-like creature) have their names mixed up.

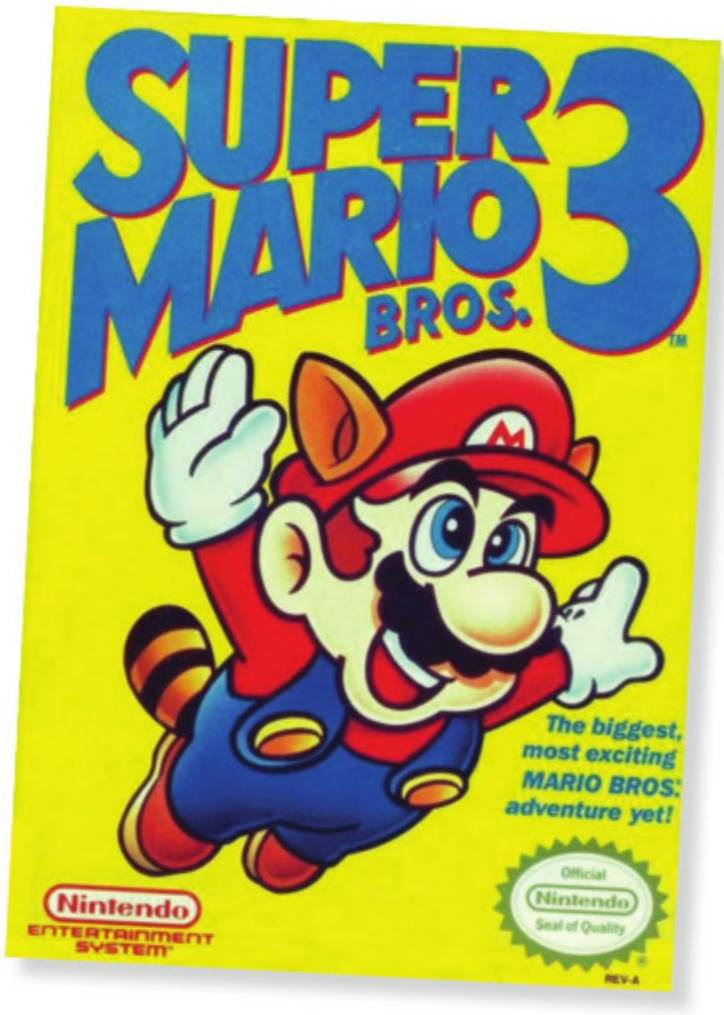
SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

Year	1990
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D4

IF SUPER MARIO Bros. set the bar for the platforming genre, Super Mario Bros. 3 raised it to such a level that it remained untouched by any other game throughout the rest of the 8-bit era (and most of those released during the 16-bit era too). Contrary to how most people remember it these days, Super Mario Bros. 3 doesn't actually open with Princess Toadstool / Peach being kidnapped. Indeed, for the vast majority of the game she's safe and well (it isn't until you reach the final eighth world that Bowser grabs her). Instead, the story goes that the Mushroom World has been invaded by Bowser's seven children, the Koopalings. Each Koopaling has invaded a different kingdom, stolen its magical wand from its king, and transformed them into an animal. It's up to Mario (and Luigi, if need be) to make their way through each kingdom, reach the king's castle, head up to the respective Koopaling's airship flying above it and defeat them to get the wand back.

After the change of pace that was the western Super Mario Bros. 2, the third game returns to the original's style of gameplay. Jumping on enemies' heads is back in, as are smashing blocks, entering pipes, swimming underwater, fighting Goombas and Koopa Troopas, collecting power-ups and doing all the other things that didn't feature in its predecessor.

It's the last of these – the power-ups – that take centre stage this time, however. While the standard Super Mushrooms, Fire Flowers and Stars are still present and accounted for, Mario is now able to find a collection of suits that give him new abilities. The most common of these is arguably the most important: the Super Leaf turns Mario into Raccoon Mario, which lets him fly for the first time in the history of the series. This is supported by the less common Tanooki Suit, which has similar powers but also lets Mario transform into a statue to avoid enemy attacks. Rounding things off are the Frog Suit (which lets you swim underwater quicker and more accurately) and the Hammer Brother Suit – so rare it isn't even mentioned in the manual – which lets Mario throw hammers at enemies.


SUPER MARIO BROS. 3
The biggest, most exciting MARIO BROS. adventure yet!
Nintendo
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality

Another innovation introduced in Super Mario Bros. 3 is the world map. Whereas 'worlds' in the first game were little more than dividers that split the 32 stages into groups of four, here each world has its own map and its own distinctive theme that extends to the game levels. Now no longer just called World 2, World 3, World 4 etc, the likes of Desert Land, Water Land and the fantastic Giant Land each bring their own unique features to the table (the latter being most memorable for its enormous enemies and blocks).

As Super Mario Bros. 3 hits its 30th anniversary (it launched in Japan in 1988), it's no surprise that it still remains firmly in many gamers' all-time top tens after all this time. The first game may have revolutionised the genre, but the third perfected it, and very few games in the three decades since have come close to bettering the formula. ■

FACT

Shigeru Miyamoto has confirmed that the entire adventure in Super Mario Bros. 3 is actually a performance played on a stage. This is why the curtain rises at the start of the game, the scenery appears to be bolted onto the wall and Mario 'exits stage right' at the end of each level.

SUPER PITFALL

Year 1987
Publisher Activision
Developer Micronics

ACTIVISION'S FIRST BIG hit as a third-party developer was 1982's Pitfall: this sequel was the studio's first ever NES game. Playing as the original's hero Pitfall Harry, you have to explore the caves surrounding the Andes mountains in search of the priceless Raj diamond while also rescuing Harry's niece Rhoda and their lion Quickclaw (who are both trapped). Harry's armed with nothing more than his agility and a pistol with a limited supply of bullets: the key, then, is dodging as many enemies as possible and only resorting to gunplay when there's no other option. Super Pitfall was roundly criticised due to its numerous bugs and bizarre design choices. For example, while most vultures kill Harry, you need to jump into some of them to warp to new areas. ■

FACT

The strange vulture warp situation can be figured out by shooting at them. If a bullet passes through a vulture, it's a warp and you can jump into it.

SUPER SPIKE V'BALL

Year 1990
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Technos Japan

ORIGINALLY RELEASED IN arcades as US Championship V'Ball, this Technos volleyball game lets you choose from four pairs of athletes: the balanced George and Murphy, the powerful but slow Al and John, the speedy but weak Ed and Michael and – for some reason – Billy and Jimmy Lee from Double Dragon. There are two different tournament modes here: the American Circuit has you playing teams from Daytona, New York, Chicago, Las Vegas and Los Angeles, while the harder World Cup is a seven-match campaign against Japan, Italy, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, the US Navy(!) and the USSR. GIven the two-on-two nature of volleyball, the game also supports the NES Satellite and Four Score so that all four characters can be controlled by human players. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of the game (still known as US Championship V'Ball) has a more intimidating USSR stage, complete with tanks. These were removed for the NES version, given the imminent end of the Cold War.

SUPER SPY HUNTER

Year 1992
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft

FIVE YEARS AFTER it ported Spy Hunter to the NES, Sunsoft released Battle Formula in Japan. It played so similarly that releasing it in the west might have led to legal problems with Midway (who owned the Spy Hunter name). To avoid this, Sunsoft agreed a deal with Midway to release the game in the west as Super Spy Hunter. It's set in the year 2525, and has players trying to stop an evil terrorist called X before he builds an ultimate war weapon that will allow him to destroy the United Nations. Super Spy Hunter has far more varied locations than its spiritual predecessor, and plays more like a racing shoot 'em up, with enemies firing weapons at you and power-ups letting you upgrade your machine gun. ■

FACT

The Spy Hunter series lay dormant until 2001, when it was rebooted for PS2, Xbox and GameCube. It was accompanied by a fantastically terrible theme tune by nu-metal band Saliva, which you really should see on YouTube.

SUPER TEAM GAMES

Year 1988
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Human Entertainment

ANOTHER GAME DESIGNED for use with the Power Pad exercise mat, Super Team Games offers a selection of athletics-themed events which are controlled using the mat. There are three obstacle courses – Course A and Course B each have four different obstacles to traverse (including log hops, water crossing, wall jumps and crab walks), while the Super Course combines both for one long race. The game also offers some standalone events – a skateboard race, a 6-legged race and a tug of war – as well as a Relay Race mode. The latter is designed for multiple players and includes an animation of your character handing over a baton, at which point a player can jump off the Power Pad to be replaced by their partner. ■

FACT

To motivate you, Super Team Games has three CPU opponents to race again. Ollie is the easiest, Jimmy is a bit faster and Jack is designed for experienced players.

SUPER TURRICAN

Year 1992
Publisher Imagineer
Developer Manfred Trenz

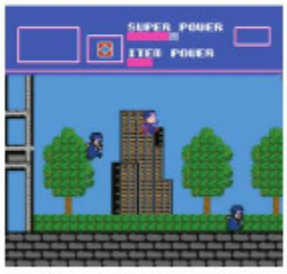
MANFRED TRENZ IS a German video game developer best known for two games: The Great Giana Sisters (which was 'heavily inspired' by Super Mario Bros.) and Turrican. The first two games in the latter – an action platformer series – were developed for the Commodore 64 and Amiga, before Trenz single-handedly created an NES version. Super Turrican is roughly based on Turrican and Turrican II, and has players controlling the titular Turrican (a bio-engineered mutant warrior) as it tries to save the planet Landorin from evil machines and mutants. The game, much like the rest of the series, is notable for its ridiculous action, massive bosses and hugely satisfying gunplay. It's one of the more difficult Turrican games, however, due to the lack of checkpoints. ■

FACT

Although Super Turrican was never released in the US, its predecessor Turrican II made it to the Mega Drive and Game Boy under the name Universal Soldier.

SUPERMAN

Year 1988
Publisher Kemco
Developer Kotobuki Systems



YOU'D THINK THAT a video game based on one of the greatest and most powerful superheroes ever would be a no-brainer but Superman has had a troubled history when it comes to gaming. The Nintendo 64's dismal Superman 64 is considered one of the worst games ever made, but before that Kemco had its own odd stab at a tie-in. The game opens with the Statue of Liberty (known here as the Statue of Freedom) telling Superman that General Zod plans to use Metropolis as his base. Off you go to put a stop to it, armed with a series of moves like X-ray vision and heat vision (as well as the ability to turn back into Clark Kent). The game's shonky collision detection and strange cutesy characters meant Superman wasn't well received. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of the game featured the Superman theme from the movies on the title screen. This was removed for the western version, for reasons not entirely clear (though presumably linked to soundtrack rights).

SWAMP THING

Year 1992
Publisher THQ
Developer Imagineering

FOX KIDS DEBUTED an animated cartoon series based on DC Comics' character Swamp Thing on Halloween night in 1990. Although it would only run for five episodes before heading to the genetically deformed swamp in the sky, it still managed to spawn a licensed NES game. In it, players control the titular mutant as he tries to stop mad scientist Anton Arcane from taking over the world, by grabbing beakers of bio-restorative formula while fighting off Arcane's robotic minions and taking part in boss fights against the Un-Men, mutated versions of Arcane's henchmen. Developer Imagineering based Swamp Thing on the same game engine as Bart vs the Space Mutants, meaning the game has a similar feel (albeit with none of the clever alien-spotting mechanics). ■

FACT

An unofficial sequel to Bart vs the Space Mutants called Return of the Space Mutants was created by homebrew developers in 2001. It used Swamp Thing as a starting point, because of its similarities to the Simpsons game.

SWORD MASTER

Year 1992
Publisher Activision
Developer Athena

THE KINGDOM OF Eledar isn't doing so well. The evil Fire Mage has forged an alliance with Vishok the Serpent God, and the latter has sent a horde of nasty creatures to the kingdom to wreak havoc. It's up to the Sword Master – who's been out roaming the Borderlands and has already saved countless lands from evil – to come back to his hometown, defeat the Fire Mage and Vishok, and rescue Princess Aria (because there's always an imprisoned princess). The game is a side-scrolling action adventure where tactical use of your sword and shield is important: swinging away randomly will get you killed so taking your time, learning your opponent's attacking style and responding correctly is the name of the game. ■

FACT

As you beat certain enemies you gain new types of magic. One of these is 'bomb', which isn't so much a form of magic as a blatant use of explosives.

SWORDS AND SERPENTS

Year 1990
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Interplay

THIS DUNGEON CRAWLER has a team of four adventurers exploring a haunted maze to try and take down a massive serpent. You can choose each character's class, or settle for the well-rounded default party consisting of Ajax the Warrior, Iago the Wizard, Mask the Thief and Erin the Mystic. There are 16 different levels to explore, each filled with all manner of creatures from basic bats and spiders to zombies, phantoms, gollums and axemen.

One thing that separates Swords and Serpents from most other dungeon crawlers of its time is the support for two or even four players (using the Four Score or NES Satellite adapters). One player controls movement as normal, but during battles each player handles their own character's actions and inventory. ■

FACT

Swords and Serpents' box art was created by iconic fantasy artist Boris Vallejo. While most of his illustrations are for sci-fi and fantasy paperback book covers, he also painted the posters for *National Lampoon's Vacation* and the *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* movies.

TABOO: THE SIXTH SENSE

Year 1989
Publisher Tradewest
Developer Rare

EASILY ONE OF the more bizarre NES games (if you could call it a game), Rare's Taboo: The Sixth Sense claims to be 'the time machine on Nintendo' but is actually a tarot card simulator. You enter a question about your future using an on-screen keyboard, and the game then draws 10 cards from its pack of 78 and reads them out to you. And that's literally it. Naturally, the manual tries its best to build it up, offering gems like: 'No responsibility is accepted in any form whatsoever relating to Taboo and any such effects, influences or miracles incurred, inferred, divulged, resulting or directly connected with Taboo whatsoever.' Which is quite the disclaimer for what's effectively an expensive digital Magic 8-Ball. ■

FACT

Taboo can also pick your 'lucky numbers' for you. You have to enter which state you live in (as in US state, not your state of mind) and it'll give you random numbers based on that.

TAG TEAM WRESTLING

Year 1986
Publisher Data East
Developer SAS Sakata

DATA EAST'S TAG Team Wrestling was originally a 1983 arcade game developed by Technos, but the NES port was handled by a different Japanese studio, SAS Sakata. As one of the earliest wrestling games released on the NES, Tag Team Wrestling is fairly bare bones. You can only play as one tag team: the Ricky Fighters, consisting of long-haired leader Ricky and his masked partner Ultramachine. Similarly, there's only one pair of opponents in the game: the grizzled Worly and Mascross, collectively known as the Strong Bads. A single-player game, then, consists of fighting against the Strong Bads over and over until you lose, with certain numbers of wins earning you new titles (three for the American Championship, eight for the European one and so on). ■

FACT

Tag Team Wrestling may not be memorable for much but its legacy did at least carry on in the popular web cartoon *Homestar Runner*, whose most popular character was called Strong Bad.

TALESPIN

Year 1991
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

BASED ON THE Disney Saturday morning cartoon starring Baloo from *The Jungle Book* (for some reason), TaleSpin continued Capcom's trend of releasing high-quality but difficult Disney games for the NES. Baloo's picking up cargo for his customers in his trusty plane the Mini Sea-Duck, but the nasty Don Karnage and his air pirates are trying to stop him making his deliveries. It's essentially a scrolling shoot 'em up, but rather than scrolling in a single direction stages can change from side-scrolling to vertical numerous times in a single stage. The Mini Sea-Duck can only fire to the right, but by pressing the A button players can flip the plane upside-down, letting Baloo take out enemies on the left side of the screen as well. ■

FACT

Like both DuckTales games, Darkwing Duck and both Chip 'n Dale games, TaleSpin is available on Capcom's digital compilation The Disney Afternoon Collection on Xbox One, PS4 and PC.

TARGET: RENEGADE

Year 1990
Publisher Taito
Developer Ocean

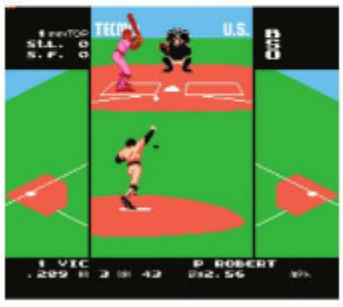
ALTHOUGH TECHNOS DEVELOPED the original Renegade, British studio Ocean acquired the rights to develop and publish ports for home computers. This deal also allowed Ocean to make its own sequels to Renegade, the first of which was Target: Renegade. You play as an unnamed fighter (he's only ever referred to as 'Renegade' in the manual) who has to track down the notorious Mr Big and rescue his brother Matt, who's being held prisoner. The game's fairly standard beat 'em up fare in the style of Double Dragon (and the first Renegade, obviously), as you fight your way through seven stages, taking in a parking garage, downtown, a park, uptown and culminating in a trip to Mr Big's headquarters, the 'pig pen'. ■

FACT

Like numerous other NES games, the Target: Renegade cover 'borrows' art from something else. In this case it's a martial arts instructional book written by 'world's greatest fighter' Joe Lewis.

TECMO BASEBALL

Year 1989
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo



ADDING TO THE massive stack of NES baseball games you may have already encountered in this book is Tecmo's offering, which is relatively bare-bones compared to other interpretations of the sport on Nintendo's system. The only options on offer here are a single-player tournament, a two-player exhibition match or an all-star match played in either 1P, 2P or CPU vs CPU modes. The player names aren't real but the player stats are still relatively similar to those in the MLB at the time: Minnesota and St Louis were powerhouses in real life when Tecmo Baseball was in development, so that's still reflected in the game even if the players can't be immediately identified. There are also only 16 teams in the game, including both all-star teams. ■

FACT

One of the most entertaining elements of the game is when a fielder jumps for a ball and misses it: they land in a heap and remain lying on the floor for a while.

TECMO BOWL

Year 1989
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo

WIDELY BELIEVED TO be the best sports series on the NES, Tecmo Bowl and its sequel are visually impressive and fast-paced American football games that continue to have a strong fanbase to this day. The first game's main single-player mode has you choosing one of the 12 available teams and facing off against the others one at a time. Although it doesn't have the official NFL licence for team names (unlike LJN's NFL, released later in the year), it does have the NFLPA licence meaning all the player names are correct. This also led to one of the most unbalanced players in sports game history in Bo Jackson, who's famously ridiculously untouchable in Tecmo Bowl to the extent that playing as LA is considered by some as cheating. ■

FACT

There are two versions of Tecmo Bowl, each featuring different Indianapolis rosters. Copies of the game with a black Nintendo Seal of Quality have Dickerson as running back and Bentley as kick returner, while copies with a white seal have Bentley and Verdin in those roles.

TECMO CUP SOCCER GAME

Year 1992
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo

UNSURPRISINGLY KNOWN AS Tecmo Cup Football Game in Europe instead, this is actually a western port of a Famicom game based on the popular football anime series *Captain Tsubasa*. Because of this, it isn't your standard football game where you control the movement and actions of each player in real-time. Instead, it plays more like a sort of football RPG, with each match consisting entirely of interactive cut-scenes and various situations where you're given menus to choose what to do. Usually this is as simple as choosing between dribbling, passing and shooting, but sometimes you'll get special situations where you have to decide between, for example, a diving header and a volley. It's a unique take on football and not an unpleasant one. ■

FACT

There were actually around ten Captain Tsubasa games released over the years. While these were mostly only released in Japan, a DS title – Captain Tsubasa: New Kick Off – did make it to Europe in 2010.

TECMO NBA BASKETBALL

Year 1992
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Sculptured Software

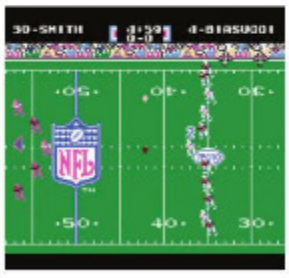
HAVING ALREADY TRIED its hand at baseball and American football, Tecmo decided to complete the triple-bill by releasing a basketball game. Although some previous basketball games had featured either the NBA licence (for real team names and logos) or the NBPA licence (for real player names), Tecmo NBA Basketball is notable in that it's the first ever game to boast both licenses, meaning all team and player names are accurate. It's quite the full-fat experience too, offering a full 82-game season complete with a playoffs and the NBA Championship at the end. There are 14 different injuries your players can get during the season, ranging from an eye cut (which drops them out of the team for 1–3 games) to a broken leg (14–17 games). ■

FACT

Tecmo NBA Basketball is based on the 1991–92 NBA season. Although Magic Johnson retired early in the season after announcing he was HIV-positive, he remains in the Lakers in this game.

TECMO SUPER BOWL

Year 1991
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo



AS MUCH AS players loved Tecmo Bowl, there were still a number of notable elements missing that would have made it even better. Tecmo Super Bowl solves many of these issues, making it easily the best American football game for the NES. Similar to Tecmo NBA Basketball, Super Bowl features both the league (NFL) and players' association (NFLPA) licences, meaning both teams and players are real (the first game lacked the NFL licence). This also means the full league of 28 teams is available, compared to 12 in the original. It supports more players on-screen, too: Tecmo Bowl only allowed nine on the field, whereas Super Bowl allows the full eleven. One thing carries over from the first game, however: Bo Jackson is still a beast. ■

FACT

Although Tecmo Super Bowl was released shortly before the 1991–92 season playoffs, its rosters were based on the 1990–91 season. This meant any 1991–92 rookies who'd become stars over the course of the season weren't found in the game.

TECMO WORLD CUP SOCCER

Year 1991
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo

A YEAR BEFORE it released the RPG-based Tecmo Cup Soccer Game, Tecmo brought a more traditional football game to Australia and mainland Europe. Actually based on the 1986 arcade game Tehkan World Cup (Tehkan was renamed Tecmo later that year), it features 16 national teams ranging from Brazil, Italy and West Germany to the likes of Scotland, Korea and 'Soviet'. Although its name suggests you'll be playing in a standard World Cup knockout format, the aim in the main single-player mode is in fact to choose one team and defeat the other 15 teams in succession in order to be crowned world champions. Thankfully, there's a password system, meaning the odd shock defeat can be easily undone should the need arise. ■

FACT

The original arcade version, renamed Tecmo Cup, was included in an 11-game Xbox compilation called Tecmo Classic Arcade in 2005, alongside the likes of Tecmo Bowl, Rygar, Solomon's Key and Bomb Jack.

TECMO WORLD WRESTLING

Year 1990
Publisher Tecmo
Developer Tecmo

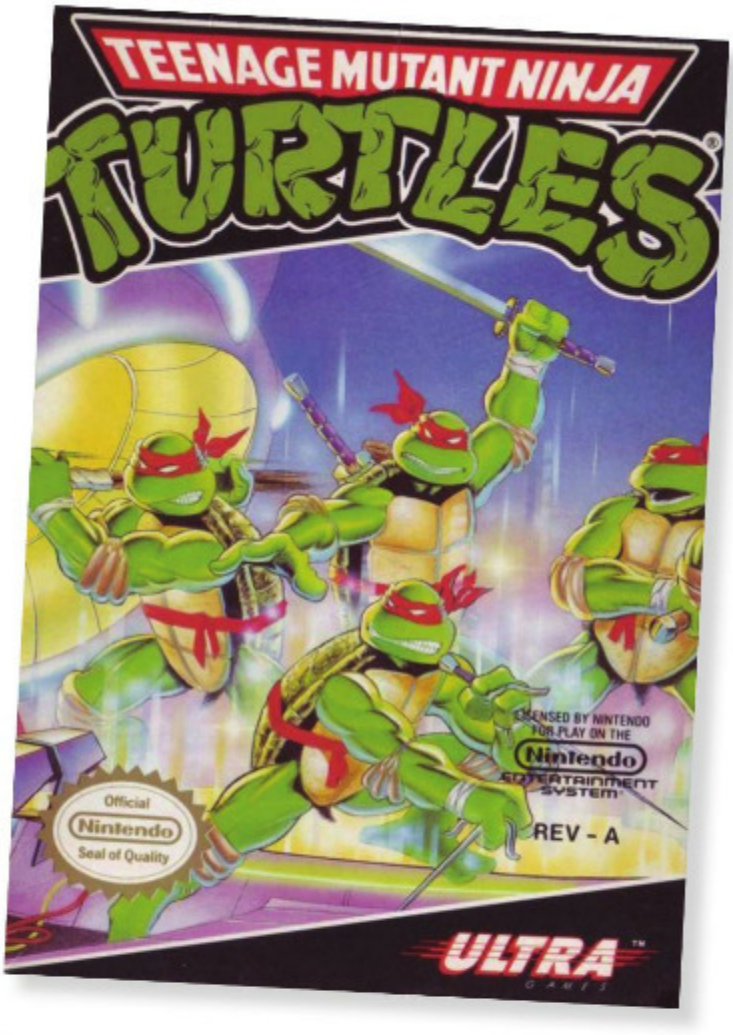
THE NES WASN'T short of wrestling games, but Tecmo World Wrestling is one of the most impressive, at least in terms of realism. Players choose from one of ten wrestlers – including the masked El Tigre, 'Siberian Machine' Boris Chekov and the suspiciously Hogan-esque Julio Falcon – and have to fight through the others in succession before the final bout against the mysterious Blue King. What makes Tecmo World Wrestling interesting is its TV-style presentation: not only does the action cut to close-up cutscenes when you perform an impressive move, there's also a commentator named Tom Talker who provides text commentary during the fight. He isn't perfect – dodgy translations mean he refers to the Northern Right Suplex instead of the Northern Lights – but it's unique nonetheless. ■

FACT

There are three training routines in the game, all of which increase your strength and are performed by bashing the A button. Squats and sit-ups are straightforward enough, but push-ups include a massive sumo wrestler sitting on your back.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

Year 1989
Publisher Ultra Games / Palcom
Developer Konami



THERE WERE VERY few kids' franchises that were more popular in the late '80s than the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and Konami (under its Ultra Games and Palcom labels) was the publisher lucky enough to secure the right to print oodles of money by releasing an NES tie-in.

The game opens with the Turtles discovering that their news reporter friend April O'Neil has been kidnapped by the evil Shredder's goons Bebop and Rocksteady. The aim in the first stage, then, is to explore New York City's streets, warehouses and sewers in search of April. Later on the story expands as their Master Splinter is kidnapped too, and eventually the whole thing culminates in a final battle against the Shredder in his Technodrome. At least, that's the plan: very few gamers ever made it that far.

For the most part, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' stages consists of two game styles. There are exploration sections where you explore the greater game area from a top-down perspective, and these then switch to side-on platformer sections whenever you enter a building or manhole. The latter is where the meat of the game lies, as players slash and bash their way through hordes of constantly generating enemies as they try to proceed. Naturally, you can choose between Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello and Raphael, each of whom is armed with their own signature weapon. These weapons are the main factor in determining each turtle's strengths and weaknesses: Raphael's tiny sai daggers are moderately powerful but their range is horrible (meaning he's likely to take damage), while Donatello swings his bo staff fairly slowly but its range is massive and it does huge damage, making him easily the best character as a result.

FACT

Because of Europe's ongoing concern about ninjas, both the cartoon and game were renamed Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles in most of Europe. The Italian and Australian versions are the only PAL ones with the Ninja name.

Each turtle only has one 'life' but the trick is that you can pause the game at any point and switch between the four turtles at will. If one turtle's health is getting low, players are encouraged to switch him out for a healthier one, because if a turtle dies they're gone for the rest of the game. This eventually forces you to play as the weaker turtles anyway, and encourages players to save the better ones for tricky situations where they may be needed.

'Tricky situations' may be an understatement: of those NES games that sold in large numbers and are considered among the most popular on the system, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is easily one of the hardest. Enemies are fast and relentless, heavy damage is a regular occurrence and the somewhat sluggish jumping controls make crossing some platforms an exercise in not only skill, but patience too. The most infamous level in the game, however, is an underwater stage in which the turtles have to swim through a maze lined with electrified plantlife and defuse eight bombs in 140 seconds. The combination of incredibly tight passageways and an even tighter time limit led to many a deceased turtle and many a thrown controller. Followed, of course, by many a press of the Start button as addicted players tried again. ■

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II: THE ARCADE GAME

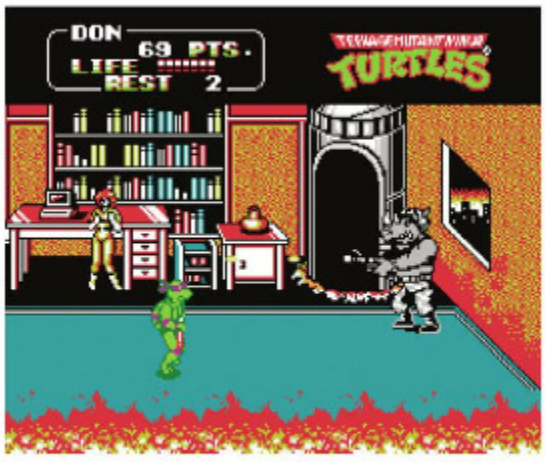
Year 1990
Publisher Ultra Games / Konami
Developer Konami

WHILE NES OWNERS were getting the first TMNT game, arcade-goers were being treated to a completely different Turtles experience: a beat 'em up in the style of Final Fight and Double Dragon. The following year this arcade game was ported to the NES, and while the graphics were downgraded it offered extra content to make up for it.

April O'Neil's been kidnapped again – her news studio could probably do with hiring some bodyguards – so the turtles head off to rescue her. As in the previous NES game, you'll do so, only to find partway through the story that Splinter's now been captured.

The NES version added a couple of extra stages that weren't in the arcade game, along with some extra story to go with them: Shredder's enlisted the help of two bounty hunters to take out the Turtles. Sure enough, these two new characters – an ice-breathing dog called Tora and a robot samurai called Shogun – are the bosses in these new levels.

This makes for a total of 10 stages: April's apartment, the streets, sewers, a snowfield, a parking lot, the freeway, 'Skateboard Speedway', the enemy base, Shogun's hideout and the Technodrome. While the vast majority of these were already in the arcade game, the NES version expands on most of them too, making for a much longer game in general. The only major thing missing from the arcade game is the ability to perform special moves, but that was to come in the follow-up. Speaking of which…. ■



FACT

The NES version includes product placement for Pizza Hut, which wasn't in the arcade game.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III: THE MANHATTAN PROJECT

Year 1992
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

THE NES PORT of the TMNT arcade game was a success so Konami created an entirely new adventure with the same engine exclusively for Nintendo's system. While on holiday in Florida, the Turtles watch a live news broadcast on TV during which the Shredder not only kidnaps April yet again but also the entire region of Manhattan, turning it into a floating island.

Cue more beat 'em up action set across eight stages: starting on the beach, you'll fight through a battleship, a bridge, New York, the sewers, the Technodrome and the rooftops before ending up on Krang's spaceship, where you take on both Krang and Super Shredder. Each turtle now has a special move, performed by pressing A and B together. ■

FACT

There's a sneaky case of false advertising here: the game box shows the turtles fighting against a Triceraton enemy armed with a laser gun. In the actual game, the Triceratons don't appear.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: TOURNAMENT FIGHTERS

Year 1994
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

THE FIGHTING GAME craze created by Street Fighter II led to a slew of imitations. Eager to hop on the bandwagon, Konami made no fewer than three completely different TMNT fighting games for the NES, SNES and Mega Drive, all called Tournament Fighters. The NES version has a story mode in which you get to choose to be one of the four turtles. You then have to fight the other three, one at a time, in order to prove that you're the best. After this you fight Casey Jones, Hothead and the Shredder, after which the game is over. If the idea of playing as the bad guy appeals more, there's also a Versus mode where you can fight as any of the seven characters. ■

FACT

Hothead is such a large sprite that Hothead vs Hothead fights aren't allowed in Versus mode.You can force one with some rematch-based trickery, but when you do both sprites flicker a lot as the NES struggles to show them both at the same time.

TENNIS

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1 / Intelligent Systems

SINCE GOLF, BASEBALL and American football fans were being catered for in the NES's launch line-up, it was only fair that tennis buffs should get their share of the goodness too. Tennis is a simple take on the sport, with a single grass court and no selectable characters to speak of. You can take part in either singles or doubles matches, either on your own against the CPU or with a friend (they can be on the same doubles team or the opposite one). There are five different difficulty settings for the AI opponent, but the timing needed for the swinging mechanic is so initially tricky that even the lowest difficulty setting can take a while to get to grips with. The game's most famous for featuring one of the first Mario cameos: he's the umpire. ■

FACT

Tennis was also a Game Boy game, which released a month after launch. It ultimately became known for being broken, though: if you missed your serve and let the ball bounce on your head, you gained a point.

THE TERMINATOR

Year 1992
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Radical Entertainment

AFTER SUNSOFT'S ATTEMPT at a Terminator game failed when the licence ran out (see Return to Silius), Mindscape got cracking on its own take. The game starts in the future and has players controlling Kyle Reese as he blasts away countless Terminators. Eventually he makes his way back to 1984, where his guns are taken away and he's left with his fists and, oddly, a bunch of baseballs. After a police station fight and some driving sections you end up in the factory where you kill the Terminator once and for all. Awkward level design and unforgiving enemy placement makes The Terminator one of the most difficult games on the NES, something exacerbated by the fact that you only have three lives and no continues. ■

FACT

PC owners definitely won out when it came to Terminator games. The DOS version was a very early free-roaming first-person adventure where players could walk around streets or get in a car and drive around.

TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY

Year 1992
Publisher LJN
Developer Software Creations

THERE WERE NO fewer than five completely different games developed to celebrate the release of *Terminator 2*, one of the biggest cinematic blockbusters of all time (even if it couldn't spell 'judgement' correctly). The NES version is a side-scrolling action platformer where you play as Arnie himself in five different locations based on the movie: the truck stop where he originally arrives from the future, an isometric bike section taking place in the flood channel, the Pescadero Mental Hospital (where you rescue Sarah Connor), the Cyberdyne headquarters and finally the Steel Mill where you square off against the T-1000. It's remarkably accurate to the film, right down to the final scene where the Terminator lowers himself into lava (although the iconic and heartbreaking 'thumbs up' is cruelly missing). ■

FACT

Many players fail to realise that Arnie can fire backwards during the bike scene by holding the down button. Without this knowledge the level is significantly more difficult.

TERRA CRESTA

Year 1990
Publisher Vic Tokai
Developer Nihon Bussan

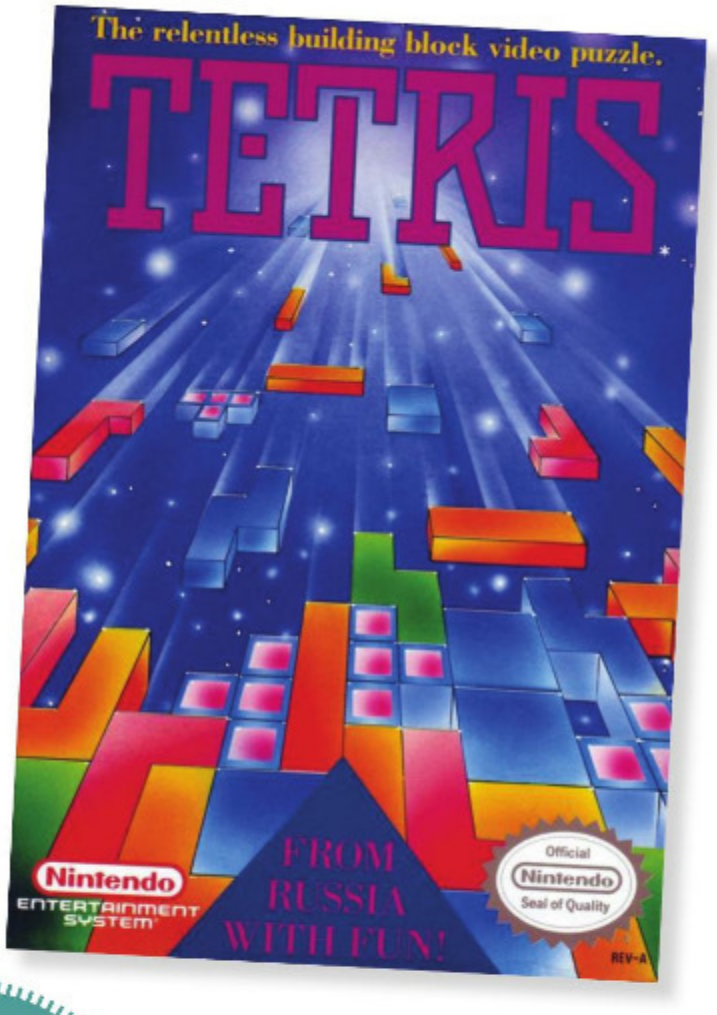
THE EVIL MANDORA has appeared and driven Earth's citizens into the sea, forcing them to live as an underwater society. Not impressed with this, the people form an organisation called Terra Cresta, designed to blast Mandora back into space and reclaim the Earth's land. Terra Cresta's title screen offers an interestingly complex 'formation design' screen: this shows your ship on a grid, and lets you position four extra ships wherever you like around it. When playing the game you can acquire these extra ships: by default they attach to your ship and increase your firepower but you can also press the A button to separate them into your custom formation, allowing you to fire in numerous directions. Get enough ships and you can turn into an invincible phalanx. ■

FACT

Terra Cresta actually spawned three sequels: Terra Force (arcade), Terra Cresta II (PC Engine / TurboGrafx) and Terra Cresta 3D (Sega Saturn).

TETRIS

Year	1989
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo



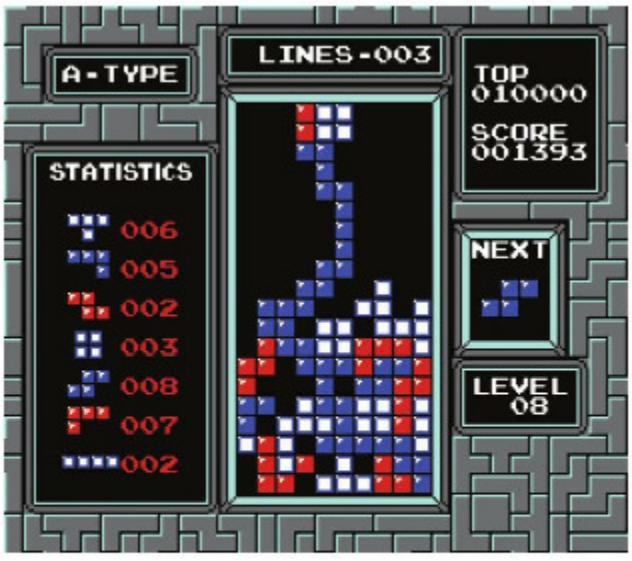
EVEN IF YOU don't already own this book – maybe you're standing in a shop and flicking through it, trying to decide whether you should buy it (please do, I tried my hardest) – the very fact you picked it up suggests you have some interest in video games, even if it's only a tiny amount. If so, you almost definitely aready know what Tetris is. If you aren't old enough to have played it on the Game Boy or NES back in the day then maybe you played it on Nintendo DS, or as a Facebook game, or on your mobile. Suggesting that may be presumptuous but consider this: Tetris has been ported to over 65 different systems over the past three decades and by 2010 it had been bought or downloaded over 170 million times, so if you've genuinely never heard of it then you're a magician when it comes to avoiding popular culture. So let's skip the breakdown of the block dropping and the line clearing.

The Nintendo-published NES version of Tetris came out around six months after Tengen's unlicensed version was pulled off the shelves (see the entry for Tetris in the 'Unlicensed Games' section of this book). Officially licensed by ELORG – the state-controlled Soviet organisation that owned the rights to the game – Nintendo's version consisted of two modes: A-Type and B-Type.

A-Type is the standard Tetris that everyone knows and loves. Starting from anywhere from level 0 (extremely slow) to level 9 (fairly speedy), players have to clear as many lines as possible and build the biggest possible score before the blocks fill to the top of the screen. Points are awarded for clearing multiple lines in a row, with Tetrises (four-line clears) scoring the most. The level (and therefore speed) affects the points scored too: get a Tetris at level 9 and you'll score 12,000 points, compared to 2,400 for doing it at level 1.

FACT

Tetris creator Alexey Pajitnov didn't earn royalties for his creation until 1996, when the Russian state reverted the rights back to him. He and Henk Rogers – who helped Nintendo get Tetris for Game Boy and NES – set up The Tetris Company, which owns the rights to this day.



B-Type, meanwhile, challenges players to complete 25 lines without getting Game Over. While this in itself is a relatively straightforward task, it's made more difficult when you increase both the level and 'height' setting (which dumps random blocks onto the stage before you start, making it harder to cleanly set up line clears). Clearing B-Type on level 9 speed triggers a cut-scene where a Nintendo characters play instruments. Clear it on level 9 height 0 and it'll be Pit playing a fiddle, do it on height 1 and he'll be joined by Link playing a flute. This goes all the way up to level 9 height 5, which adds a jigging Mario and Luigi, Donkey Kong on drums, Bowser playing an accordion, Samus on a cello and Princess Peach clapping away.

Although there were better versions of Tetris, the NES version continues to enjoy a following to this day, partly because the lack of features that were added later (like 'infinite spin' and drop previews) makes it more difficult and therefore a more compelling game to try and master. ■

TETRIS 2

Year 1993
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1

WHEN YOU'VE GOT one of the most popular video games of all time on your hands, of course a sequel is inevitable. Rather than repeating the formula, though, Tetris 2 is very different to its predecessor and actually shares more in common with Dr. Mario. There are now nine different pieces (the square block is gone, and three new ones arrive in its place) and the aim is no longer to clear lines, but to match up colours. Each individual block is either red, blue or yellow, and matching three of the same colour makes them disappear. Each stage has flashing blocks (similar to Dr. Mario's viruses), and clearing all of those finishes the stage. The game also adds a vs mode, something the original Tetris was lacking on NES. ■

FACT

Tetris 2 is known as Tetris Flash in Japan, which is perhaps a more appropriate name given that it's all about clearing the flashing blocks.

THE THREE STOOGES

Year 1989
Publisher Activision
Developer Beam Software

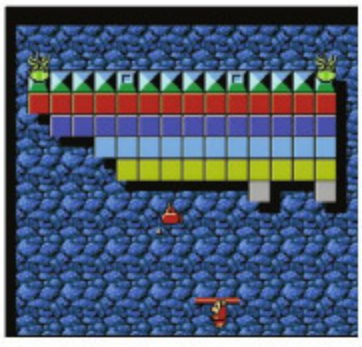
MA'S ORPHANGE IS set to be torn down unless evil mortgage lender I. Fleecem gets $5,000 in 30 days. The Three Stooges vow to help, and head into Stoogeville to look for jobs to help them pay the costs. These jobs take the form of various mini-games based on Three Stooges movies: one has you trying to eat as many crackers as possible (taken from the movie *Dutiful but Dumb*) while another, based on *Punch Drunks*, has Larry trying to collect a radio so he can play Pop Goes the Weasel, which will spur Curly on to win a boxing match. Naturally, you can also indulge in the classic face-slapping routine the Stooges were known for, with success determining how easy it is to choose mini-games. ■

FACT

The game opens with the Ghostbusters II logo, before the Stooges walk in and Curly declares: 'Hey fellas, we're in the wrong game!'

THUNDER & LIGHTNING

Year 1990
Publisher Romstar
Developer Athena



THIS IS AN interesting ball and bricks game, similar to Breakout and Arkanoid, with a bizarre storyline. You play as Mr Chin, star of the earlier Game Boy game Mr Chin's Gourmet Paradise, as his quest to find the ultimate delicacy disturbs the Thunderwarrior. Telling Mr Chin that 'there are foods better left uneaten, answers better left unknown and places better left unseen', the Thunderwarrior punishes him by making him clear 'the 30 Walls of Regret'. Mr Chin is armed with a stick (the 'bat' the player controls), and has to use it to bounce the ball into 30 screens' worth of blocks. As in Arkanoid enemies roam the screen and you can collect power-ups, like a gun, to help you clear stages quicker. ■

FACT

You would expect a game with a story as odd as this to have a similarly strange ending. Instead, once you beat level 30 the words 'Game Over' flash up almost immediately.

THUNDERBIRDS

Year 1990
Publisher Activision
Developer Pack-in Video

IT'S FAIR TO say that Gerry Anderson's classic 1960s puppet-based sci-fi show was far more popular in Europe (in particular its native UK) than it was in North America. Despite this, Activision's NES tie-in never received a PAL release. It's a vertical shoot 'em up consisting of 12 stages, in which players get to control Thunderbirds 1–4 and the lesser known bulldozer Firefly. The aim is to travel the world, trying to stop the notorious Hood from carrying out his evil deeds. Interestingly, the game doesn't feature a 'lives' system like most shooters do. Instead, you have 60 days to complete the entire campaign: beating a level uses up one day, and every time your ship is destroyed it takes three days to repair it. ■

FACT

Thunderbirds is bigger in Japan: not only was the NES version released there, there was also a Japan-only SNES game called Thunderbirds: International Rescue Team Attack!!

THUNDERCADE

Year 1989
Publisher Sammy
Developer Micronics

YOU CAN TELL terrorism is getting out of hand when terrorist groups start building their own nuclear power plants. That's exactly what AATOM (Atomic Age Terrorist Organisation of Miracali) has done, which is why the 'world powers' have initiated Operation Thundercade. This consists of you, a solitary chap on a motorbike, being closely followed by a B-52 bomber. For the most part Thundercade is a standard vertical shoot 'em up: weapon power-ups come in the form of different sidecars that bolt onto the side of your bike and fire different types of bullets.The bomber comes into play whenever you press the B button, at which point it swoops in and drops a massive bomb (pretty much like any smart bomb in a shoot 'em up, really). ■

FACT

Thundercade has a brief side-scrolling bonus game where the bomber drops a bunch of parachutes containing power-ups and you have to collect as many as possible.

TIGER HELI

Year 1987
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Micronics

ANOTHER VERTICAL SCROLLING shoot 'em up in which the player is a lone hero trying to bring down a terrorist organisation. This time the venue is Cantun – a country entirely run by terrorists – and you're the nameless pilot of Tiger Heli, a combat helicopter. Not just any helicopter, mind, you, but 'the result of a billion-dollar defence project to create the ultimate stealth jetcopter'. Which is basically just an excuse for it being able to move in eight directions without the sort of momentum you'd get in a real chopper. Along the way, you'll come across little red crosses: shoot these and 'support helicopters' appear alongside you to increase your firepower. Oddly, these fly just as well as your billion-dollar helicopter: we demand an inquiry. ■

FACT

Taito released Tiger Heli on the Famicom in Japan but decided not to do so in the west. Acclaim picked up the rights to bring it to the NES, where it reportedly sold a million copies.

TIME LORD

Year 1990
Publisher Milton Bradley
Developer Rare

CALM DOWN, DOCTOR Who fans: this isn't about that sort of time lord. Set on 1 January 2999, Time Lord opens with the MB Time Travel Research Centre under attack by aliens called Drakkons. You have to travel to four time periods – Castle Harman in England (1250), Dead Man's Gulch in the USA (1860), a pirate ship on the Caribbean (1650) and France during the Second World War (1943) – and collect the five orbs in each (the fifth being held by a Drakkon Lord). The twist is that you have a limited time to finish the task: each day in the game lasts around 6 seconds, and the time travel system will self-destruct on 1 January 3000 (meaning you have to beat the game in 36 minutes and 30 seconds). ■

FACT

Each stage has era-accurate weaponry to find, from a sword in medieval England to a six-shooter and shotgun in the Wild West, to a rocket laser gun in the final section set in 2999.

TIMES OF LORE

Year 1991
Publisher Toho
Developer Origin Systems

THIS HEFTY ADVENTURE game was created in 1988 by Chris Roberts, who had helped design Ultima V at around the same time and eventually went on to become known as the creator of the Wing Commander series (and its constantly postponed modern successor Star Citizen). Playing as either a barbarian, a valkyrie or a knight, you have to find out why High King Valwyn of Albareth hasn't returned in 20 years, while fighting off the barbarians, bandits and monsters that now regularly attack the kingdom. This NES port is arguably the best, as it features fewer frustrating random encounters than the home computer versions that came before it and has a larger field of view, meaning you can see enemies approaching from further away. ■

FACT

Ultima V has a character called Christopher who tells the player: 'I'm currently working on an epic called Times of Lore! I hope to have it published soon.'

TINY TOON ADVENTURES

Year 1991
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

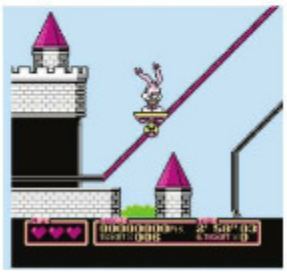
IN THE EARLY '90s Konami secured the licence to make games based on Warner Bros. and Steven Spielberg's *Tiny Toon Adventures* cartoon series. This NES game was the first of nine Tiny Toon games released over the course of three years, and has Buster Bunny trying to rescue Babs from Montana Max. By collecting star balls you can switch to one of three other characters, each with their own abilities: Furrball can climb walls, Dizzy Devil has a spin attack and Plucky Duck can fly. Some stages have odd single-screen 'boss fights' against Elmyra, an extreme pet lover who just wants to grab and squeeze your character: the aim is simply to avoid her for a period of time until an exit door appears. ■

FACT

The voice of Buster in the cartoon series was provided by Charlie Adler. He also voiced the lead characters in Cow and Chicken, and most recently voiced Starscream in the Transformers movies.

TINY TOON ADVENTURES 2: TROUBLE IN WACKYLAND

Year 1993
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami



THE SECOND NES Tiny Toon Adventures game is set in a mysterious amusement park that suddenly opens just outside of town. Buster gets a letter from 'a secret admirer' inviting him and his friends to come to the park, so off they go: unaware that the admirer is actually Montana Max, who plans to hurt our heroes with a series of tricks and traps. The game consists of five different 'rides', each played with a different character: Babs on the roller coaster, Plucky on the bumper cars, Hamton on the runaway train, Furrball on the log ride and Buster in the funhouse maze (which you can only enter once you've earned enough tickets in the other stages). It culminates in a battle against Max in his airship. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of the game is called Tiny Toon Adventures 2: Welcome to Montana Land, which sort of ruins the idea of Buster and his pals not knowing who's running the park.

TINY TOON ADVENTURES CARTOON WORKSHOP

Year 1992
Publisher Konami
Developer Novotrade

THIS INTERESTING NON-GAME lets players create their own animated cutscenes using *Tiny Toon Adventures* characters. Using a basic menu system, you choose a setting for your cartoon, followed by one or two characters. You can then apply an animation to those characters, then 'film' them to record these animations. Once you've done this you can add special props, music and sound effects, and even add text dialogue boxes. Naturally, given the potential for wrong-doing here, the text boxes limit you to a series of pre-made phrases rather than letting you type what you want. You can make cartoons up to five minutes long, but you can't save them: the manual does give instructions on setting your NES up to a VCR to record them, though. ■

FACT

In case younger gamers can't get to grips with the menu system here, the manual includes a 101-step tutorial that teaches them how to make a new cartoon from start to finish.

TO THE EARTH

Year 1989
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Cirque Verte

DON'T GET TOO concerned, but in 2050 the Earth will fall victim to a bacteriological attack by a group of aliens called the Raggosians. You have to travel in your spaceship to Uranus, Saturn and Jupiter to collect certain minerals then return to Earth to create a special antibacterial agent to fight the attack. Along the way you have to destroy countless Raggosian ships that approach: what we have here, then, is a light gun game where you use the Zapper to blow away enemy spacecraft. To the Earth is considered the hardest Zapper game on the NES: the alien ships move extremely quickly, and not only do you take damage if you don't shoot them, you also take damage if you shoot and miss. ■

FACT

The game ends with you landing your ship and being congratulated by the president of the terrestrial federation, 'Nester the Magnificent'. Nester was the mascot for Nintendo Power magazine.

TOKI

Year 1991
Publisher Taito
Developer Daiei

SPARE A THOUGHT for Toki the warrior. One day, while out for a walk with his girlfriend Miho, Toki is encountered by Vookimedlo the sorcerer and Bashtar the invisible giant. As the latter grabs Miho and runs off, the former transforms Toki into a little monkey and flies off. Thankfully the Spirit of the Jungle sees this and gives Toki the ability to shoot fireballs from his mouth. Set across six stages, Toki has to make his way to the Golden Palace and rescue his lady friend. Given Toki's spitting ability this is more a run-and-gun game than a standard platformer, especially since you can aim your spits upwards and diagonally. You can also collect an American football helmet for temporary invincibility, which is nice. ■

FACT

The Mega Drive version of Toki was ported by Sega and renamed Toki: Going Ape Spit.

TOM & JERRY

Year 1991
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer Software Creations

THIS STRAIGHTFORWARD PLATFORMER puts you in the role of Jerry the mouse (let's face it, playing as Tom would be grim if the aim was to successfully catch Jerry). Tom's kidnapped Jerry's nephew Tuffy and locked him in a trunk up in the attic. It's up to Jerry to make his way from the basement all the way up through the house until he reaches the attic, all while trying to avoid Tom's attempts to catch him. Jerry's default weapon is an unlimited supply of marbles, but you can collect defensive weapons along the way to help avoid certain obstacles. These range from harmless enough items like bubble gum and a cup of water, to slightly more concerning objects like a drill, hammer and meat cleaver. ■

FACT

The SNES got a different Tom & Jerry game which was set across a number of different locations (including a movie theatre and toy store) and let a second player control Tuffy.

TOMBS & TREASURE

Year 1991
Publisher Infocom
Developer Compile

AN RPG ADVENTURE initially designed for Japanese home computers but eventually ported to the NES, Tombs & Treasure is set in the Mayan city of Chichen Itza. It opens with the story of Professor Imes, an expert on Mayan writing who heads to Chichen Itza with seven men. Everyone except for the professor's guide disappears, so the guide heads back out with the professor's daughter and a young lad who's her love interest. The game switches between an isometric view (when you're exploring the larger landscape) to a first-person view when you enter buildings. Although there's some combat and a basic experience system which makes your attacks more powerful, this is more of an adventure game where exploring each area and solving puzzles is key. ■

FACT

Tombs & Treasure is actually a sequel: the original Japanese release is called Asteka II: Temple of the Sun. The original Asteka has you visiting Palenque in South Mexico instead.

TOP GUN

Year 1987
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

TONY SCOTT'S ROMANTIC military action movie is one of the films that defines the very essence of the 1980s, so it should probably come as no surprise that this NES rendition reportedly sold around 2 million copies. Taking control of an F-14 Tomcat fighter, you have to take part in four missions: a training exercise to show you've got the chops, destroying an enemy aircraft carrier, destroying an enemy base and destroying an enemy space shuttle (to prevent them launching satellite missiles and starting WWIII). After each mission you have to return to the USS *Enterprise* aircraft carrier and successfully land. Crash while doing this on your last life and you'll fail the mission, even if you've already destroyed your target. It's harsh, but that's war. Or something. ■

FACT

The landing section is notorious for being difficult but it's actually simple enough: follow the on-screen directions and try to stay at around altitude 200 and speed 290.

TOP GUN: THE SECOND MISSION

Year 1990
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

THE SECOND TOP Gun game offers more of the same sort of thing, once again putting you in the cockpit of an F-14 Tomcat. This time there are three missions which have you destroying an enemy bomber, a top secret helicopter and an enemy space shuttle (and, of course, successfully landing after completing each). While the first game had four missions, the trio here are longer and consist of numerous parts. There's also a new '1P VS' mode, where you take on a series of seven enemy planes in one-on-one dogfights. Although their nationality is never stated, given that they have names like Boris Bombzinsky, Gorky Skykovsky, Dmitri Jetsky and Stalin Fortimesky, it's probably not too wild to assume some sort of Soviet influence. ■

FACT

This wasn't the last Top Gun game on a Nintendo platform. The Game Boy, GameCube, Game Boy Advance and DS all received Top Gun themed games too.

TOP PLAYERS' TENNIS

Year 1990
Publisher Asmik
Developer Home Data

ONE OF THE first tennis games to secure the official names of star players, Top Players' Tennis lets you play as either legendary men's player Ivan Lendl or similarly iconic women's star Chris Evert as you attempt to win the Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon and US Open. If you'd rather, you can also play as 'Girl' or 'Boy' (whose stats can be increased) and simply receive advice from Lendl and Evert instead. You can occasionally pull off one of five 'miracle shots', which let you do fantastical things from returning the ball without touching it to splitting the ball into a bunch of smaller ones. The European version of the game was renamed Four Players' Tennis and replaced Lendl and Evert with the more generic Mark and Nancy. ■

FACT

As the European name suggests, Top Players' Tennis allowed for doubles matches with up to four players using the NES Satellite or Four Score.

TOTAL RECALL

Year 1990
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Interplay

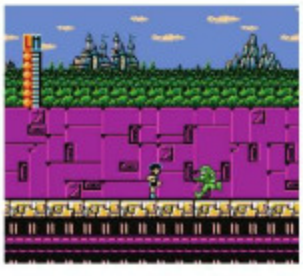
PAUL VERHOEVEN'S ICONIC 1990 sci-fi action movie is considered one of the finest Arnold Schwarzenegger films of all time, but the same isn't generally said about Interplay's NES adaptation. Playing as Schwarzenegger's character Douglas Quaid, you have to make your way through nine stages (four on Earth, five on Mars) fighting a host of enemies that have nothing to do with the film, the most notorious being a bearded dwarf in a pink suit. Although it has some nifty moments that do acknowledge its source material (including a shootout taking place behind a massive X-Ray machine), Total Recall is nonetheless notorious for its exceptionally high difficulty level and frustrating combat. Oddly, a movie theatre at the start of the game is showing *Total Recall*, which is quite meta. ■

FACT

It seems Interplay forgot it was making a game about *Total Recall* and not *The Terminator*. Each time you die the game shows a picture of Arnie saying 'I'll be back', while the Game Over screen says: 'Your game has been terminated.'

TOTALLY RAD

Year 1991
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Aicom



IN CASE YOU were wondering what the most '90s sounding game title of all time is, you now have your answer. Totally Rad puts you in control of Jake, a 'regular dude' who has to rescue a 'righteous babe' called Allison and her dad from an evil force called Edogy. Luckily, Jake has been taught how to use magic by a 'gnarly old magician' called Zebediah, meaning he can cast the likes of fire, wind, water and stone spells to affect enemies. He can even transform into an eagle, lion or fish as well, should he so wish. In case it isn't clear from the quotes, Totally Rad's instruction manual is packed with ridiculous surfer lingo, and reads like it's written by a bad Bill & Ted impersonator. ■

FACT

Bizarrely, the US manual stops at one point to show a photo of a random woman, with a caption describing her as a 'very righteous babe, for sure'. The UK version of the manual doesn't have this picture.

TOUCHDOWN FEVER

Year 1991
Publisher SNK
Developer SNK

SNK'S TAKE ON American football was based on a 1987 arcade game. While it didn't look quite as graphically detailed, many believe the NES version is still better because it's faster and the smaller sprites give players more room to move around. Being an arcade style game, there are only five plays on offer here: long pass, short pass, QB sneak, 'backs' (a running play) and kicking. There are no official league, team or player licences here so the 12 teams available are technically fictional. That said, some of their mascots make it clear they're still based on the real teams: Detroit has a lion, Miami has a dolphin, Chicago has a bear, and so on. A half-time show has the home team's mascot doing a little dance. ■

FACT

The arcade version of Touchdown Fever used a 'rotary stick'. This was a normal joystick which could not only be moved in eight directions, but could also be twisted by the head for quick turning.

TOWN & COUNTRY SURF DESIGNS: WOOD & WATER RAGE

Year 1988
Publisher LJN
Developer Atlus

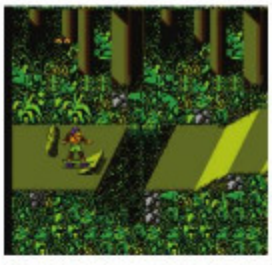
IN CASE YOU'RE not the surfing type, Town & Country Surf Designs is one of the most famous brands when it comes to surfboards and general surfwear. In the '80s, T&C became known for t-shirts featuring its mascots, known as 'Da Boys'. This NES tie-in lets you choose from four of said boys – Joe Cool, Tiki Man, Kool Kat and Thrilla Gorilla – as you take part in two different game types. Street Skate Session challenges you to reach the finish line of a street skating course within a minute while avoiding obstacles like baseballs and Frisbees. Big Wave Encounter, meanwhile, is a surfing challenge where you have to perform tricks on a wave then make it to the end without falling. ■

FACT

According to Steve Nazar, the artist who designed Da Boys, T&C had an internal split at one point, with its Hawaii base taking the logo and name, leaving its California base with just the rights to the characters.

TOWN & COUNTRY II: THRILLA'S SURFARI

Year 1992
Publisher LJN
Developer Sculptured Software



IT WAS PRESUMABLY DECIDED that Thrilla Gorilla, the bandana-wearing simian spokesperson for T&C, was the company's most popular mascot. As such, the company's second NES game ditches the rest of Da Boys and sends Thrilla to Africa, where he has to rescue his girlfriend Barbi Bikini from the evil witch doctor Wazula. The majority of its 33 stages take place on either a skateboard or a surfboard and tend to take one of three forms: a side-scrolling platformer, an isometric platformer or a side-scrolling shoot 'em up. Although Da Boys make cameo appearance in cut-scenes, this is very much Thrilla's game, making him one of the first surfing simians to appear on a Nintendo system (certainly long before Funky Kong made his debut appearance). ■

FACT

The game ends with Thrilla rescuing Barbi (who's a human, not a monkey), followed by the pair sunbathing at a penthouse apartment.

TOXIC CRUSADERS

Year 1992
Publisher Bandai
Developer Tose

TOXIC CRUSADERS WAS a cartoon series (aimed at children) based on Troma's gory Toxic Avenger movies (very much not aimed at children). Bandai's NES game has the hero Toxie trying to rescue his girlfriend Yvonne and the rest of the Toxic Crusaders from the evil clutches of the notoriously named Dr Killemoff. Toxie's armed with his trusty mop, which can be powered up to fire projectiles and be thrown as a boomerang. If he's hit by an enemy it'll be powered down, and if he's hit when it's on its lowest power he'll have to resort to using his fists instead. The game is set over six levels: Tromaville, Tromaville High School, a factory, a highway, a sewer and finally Dr Killemoff's headquarters in Island City. ■

FACT

There were four Toxic Avengers movies. In the fourth, Citizen Toxie, our hero and his obese sidekick Lardass have to fight his evil doppelganger Noxie. Very high-brow stuff.

TRACK & FIELD

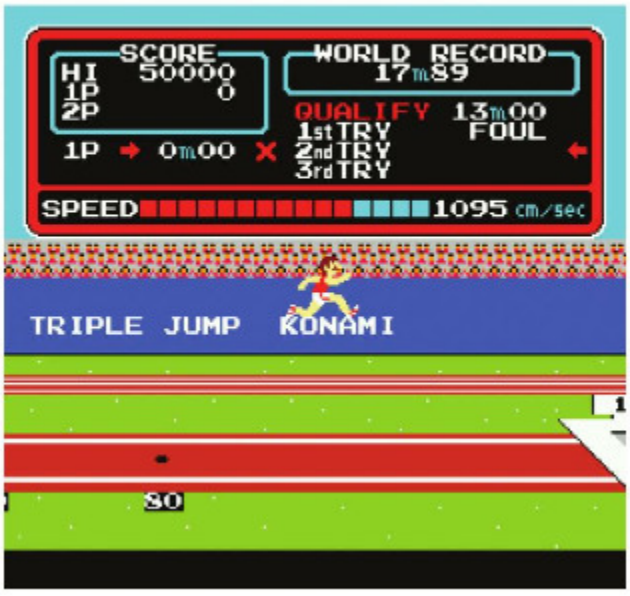
Year 1987
Publisher Konami / Kemco
Developer Konami

KONAMI'S LEGENDARY OLYMPICS-THEMED game was initially released in arcades in 1983, then went through a number of changes before it made it to the west. It was originally ported to the Famicom as Hyper Olympic (the Japanese name for the arcade game) but only contained four events: 100m, Long Jump, 110m Hurdles and Javelin.

Later on, the Famicom got a second game based on the arcade sequel Hyper Sports: this time the available events were High Jump, Freestyle Swimming, Skeet Shooting and Archery. When Konami finally made the decision to bring Hyper Olympic and Hyper Sports to the NES in the west, it decided to combine them both to make a single game – Track & Field – resulting in a cartridge containing a more robust eight events.

The original arcade version of Track & Field was famous for making popular the concept of featuring two run buttons to build power. Players had to quickly alternate between hitting each button to emulate the act of running, with a third button sometimes used for other actions (jumping hurdles, setting the angle for throws and the like). The NES version didn't adopt this, instead making players bash just the A button and using the D-Pad for actions.

Initially, Track & Field was only released in North America in 1987 and didn't make it to Europe. This changed a whole half decade later when the Barcelona '92 Olympics arrived. In an attempt to cash in, Konami renamed its five-year-old game Track & Field in Barcelona and finally released it in European markets. ■



FACT

Although Track & Field is credited with inventing the two-button running system, it didn't: it only made it popular. 1980's Olympic Decathlon for the TRS-80 and Apple II had players hitting the 1 and 2 keys to build speed.

TRACK & FIELD II

Year 1989
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

THE SEQUEL TO Track & Field nearly doubled the number of events, with 15 now available to choose from. The hurdles, freestyle swimming, skeet shooting and archery are carried over from the original, but the rest are new to the series (many of which are set neither on track nor field). Fencing, triple jump, high dive, hammer throw, taekwondo, pole vault, canoeing and the horizontal bar all make their Track & Field debuts, while three non-Olympic 'exhibition events' – hang gliding, arm wrestling and pistol shooting – round things off.

Since it came to both North America and Europe in 1989, this resulted in an odd situation in which the second Track & Field game came to European countries a full three years before the first game did. ■

FACT

This time players can choose a country to represent while competing. There are 28 countries in total, ranging from the likes of Great Britain, United States and Canada to Liberia, Iraq and the Central African Republic.

TREASURE MASTER

Year 1991
Publisher American Softworks
Developer Software Creations

AMERICAN SOFTWORKS CAME up with this unique concept: an action platformer that doubled as a nationwide competition. There are five stages, plus a secret sixth stage that can only be unlocked with a special password. The password was revealed on MTV at noon on 11 April 1992: players had to enter it to unlock the sixth stage, called Prize World. If they could beat the whole game including Prize World by midnight, they were given a code and a hotline number to call. Two first prize winners got to choose between a trip for four to a major rock concert, a trip for four to a major sporting event, a full home entertainment system (a 50-inch TV, a SNES with 12 games and an audio system) or $10,000. ■

FACT

The competition may be long over but you can still enter the password to unlock the sixth world. Enter 3HDJL9DNQV2WYTV 4S91RXR86 to get access to it.

TROG

Year 1991
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Visual Concepts

A PREHISTORIC TAKE on Pac-Man, Trog lets you play as one of two mini dinosaurs known as Dino-Mites: a blue one named Bloop or a yellow one called Spike. The aim is to collect all the eggs on each stage while trying to avoid the Trogs, a group of large one-eyed cavemen. Once you've collected all the eggs, a home panel will start flashing and you have to make your way there to finish the level. Whereas Pac-Man has his power pellets, Bloop and Spike go for a more direct approach: by pressing the A or B button you can punch any Trogs that come near. The stages are more complex than in Pac-Man too, with teleports, catapults and spring shoes featuring in later levels. ■

FACT

Trog was originally supposed to be a strategy game where players laid out paths for their character to walk along. Players at test arcades hated it, so it was turned into a Pac-Man style game instead.

TROJAN

Year 1987
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

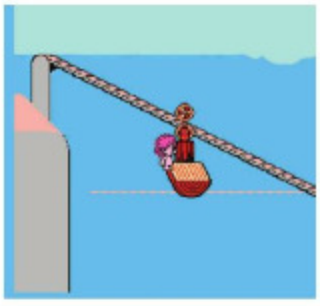
SOMETIMES, AFTER ENTHUSIASTICALLY following a leader for a while, you realise they aren't all they're cracked up to be. That's the case in Trojan, where our titular hero – a trojan warrior fighting for the powerful Achilles in the year 2026 (post nuclear war, of course) – discovers the chap is an evil tyrant, and so decides to join the resistance to fight against him. Trojan is a side-scrolling action game taking place over seven stages, where using your sword to cut down enemies is the order of the day. While the original arcade game it was based on was notorious for its difficulty (any excuse to get arcade-goers to cough up more cash!), the NES version dials back the challenge a little, making it more entertaining to play. ■

FACT

Trojan was designed by Takashi Nishiyama, who in the following year created the first Street Fighter game and produced Mega Man.

THE TROLLS IN CRAZYLAND

Year 1991
Publisher American Softworks
Developer KID



SUPER MARIO BROS. 2 wasn't the only NES game to draw inspiration from a Japanese game called 'Doki Doki', you know. The Trolls In Crazyland was originally a Japanese game called Doki! Doki! Yuenchi, which was then repurposed for Italy and western Europe with the addition of Danish woodcutter Thomas Dam's much-loved Troll dolls, which were all the rage in the early '90s. It's a platformer with an odd premise: a troll's watching a movie of his girlfriend at a funfair. When she's kidnapped, he jumps into the screen to rescue her (quite literally an opening cinematic). Despite the love Europe had for Troll dolls, the game's clunky controls and poor jumping mechanics give the impression that American Softworks and KID were doing some trolling of their own. ■

FACT

Troll dolls were created in 1959 by Thomas Dam. In 2013 the rights to the dolls were bought outright by Dreamworks, in preparation for its Trolls movie.

TWIN COBRA

Year 1990
Publisher Sammy
Developer Micronics

THIS SPIRITUAL SEQUEL to Tiger Heli once again has you controlling a helicopter as you shoot down enemies. This time there's no trivial nonsense like an actual storyline getting in the way: you just jump in your helicopter and start blasting at droves of oncoming enemies for no apparent reason. There are ten stages in total, and for the most part you'll be taking out other choppers, tanks and gun turrets. The game's ending is pleasantly uplifting, informing you: 'Congratulations. Your mission is complete. Your success is a mark of your courage and exceptional ability. You have attained the crown of victory, and we hope that your life is full of achievements.' If only all games delivered such a heartfelt message at the end. ■

FACT

Twin Cobra got a sequel (the inventively titled Twin Cobra II), which launched in 1996 in arcades and on the Sega Saturn. It offered more of the same but added a new hyper bomb attack.

TWIN EAGLE

Year 1989
Publisher Romstar
Developer Visco

IT SEEMS THAT someone somewhere loved helicopter shoot 'em ups, because Twin Eagle is yet another example of the subgenre on the NES. This time the story revolves around a chap referred to as 'Joe's brother', who was shot down in enemy territory while trying to destroy their fortress. For once this isn't a rescue mission: Joe's brother is dead and gone. Instead, the player – presumably playing as Joe, though it's never confirmed – has to make their way through five stages to reach and destroy the enemy fortress in an attempt to 'avenge Joe's brother, and to restore peace and tranquility in our world'. Twin Eagle includes two-player drop-in combat: a friend can enter the action by pressing the A button whenever they want. ■

FACT

The arcade version of Twin Eagle has the slightly awkward full title Twin Eagle: Revenge Joe's Brother. It's not clear whether this was supposed to be 'Avenge' instead.

UFOURIA: THE SAGA

Year 1992
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft

THIS FAIRLY UNCOMMON platform game was only released in Japan and PAL countries: a version was planned for North America but never released. It tells the story of Bop-Louie, a little white creature wearing winter clothing. He and his friends Shades, Freeon-Leeon and Gil have fallen into a giant crater, so he has to find them, fight them (they've all lost their memory and are hostile), win their trust and then face off against the giant alien who it turns out is behind all this. As is so often the case with Sunsoft platformers, Ufouria is a high quality title: the music is brilliantly catchy and some of the character designs are hilarious. It's easily one of the better PAL-exclusive NES games. ■

FACT

In Japan the game (and its hero) is known as Hebereke, and was in fact the first in the long-running Hebereke series. Hebereke became Sunsoft's mascot for a while.

ULTIMA: EXODUS

Year 1989
Publisher FCI
Developer Newtopia Planning

THE ULTIMA COLLECTION of role-playing games is considered among of the greatest of all time. The main series had nine games, of which parts 3–5 were released on the NES. This is Ultima III: it tells the story of a mysterious evil called Exodus that threatens to destroy the land of Sosaria from its Isle of Fire. It soon emerges that Exodus is a computer-like AI and your party has to collect four magical punch cards to defeat it (by inserting them in the right order). The NES port of Ultima III came six years after its original release, and as such it brought with it greatly overhauled graphics and a new soundtrack. It's also easier to play, offering a menu-based system instead of the keyboard controls in other versions. ■

FACT

None of the Ultima games were given numerical titles on the NES. Although this is Ultima III, it's only ever called Ultima: Exodus on Nintendo's system.

ULTIMA: QUEST OF THE AVATAR

Year 1990
Publisher FCI
Developer Infinity

THE FOURTH ULTIMA game is different from most other RPGs (certainly those on the NES, at least) because it doesn't take place in a world that's doomed or overrun by some sort of evil force. Instead the land of Britannia is a relatively prosperous one, and the aim this time isn't to rescue anyone but to help people out with side-quests and set a good example for the townspeople. The point is to learn about the eight virtues – each assigned to a different party member (the Bard's is Compassion, for example) – then use the knowledge from them all to gain access to the Codex of Ultimate Wisdom. This will turn you into the Avatar, the 'master of the codex' who will help spread peace throughout the land. ■

FACT

Much like Exodus, the NES version of Quest of the Avatar has greatly enhanced graphics and features new music. It also cuts down the number of dialogue options, though.

ULTIMA: WARRIORS OF DESTINY

Year 1993
Publisher FCI
Developer Origin Systems

PEACE AND QUIET may be well and good, but in the world of video games it never lasts long. The fifth Ultima game takes the serene land of Britannia from its predecessor and plunges it into suffering, with the evil Lord Blackthorn and his Shadowlords in charge. Playing as the Avatar from the last game – who's since been travelling the world doing general hero stuff all over the place – you have to return to Britannia and restore it back to peace again. The NES port of Warriors of Destiny came out after Ultima VI had already been released on home computers, so Origin Systems decided to drastically alter it to play more like the sixth game (most notably with a new isometric viewpoint). ■

FACT

Despite basing itself on Ultima VI instead of V, Warriors of Destiny was generally criticised by fans for its extremely slow gameplay and its limited dialogue.

ULTIMATE AIR COMBAT

Year 1992
Publisher Activision
Developer Activision

YOU ARE THE Navy's greatest test pilot, called on by the president to remove the threat of evil dictator Luigi Don Gwano. With three planes – the AV-8 Harrier, F14 Tomcat and F18 Hornet – at your disposal, you have to take on 37 missions and complete them all to save the free world. Uniquely, Ultimate Air Combat's missions are split into two game styles: you fly to your target via a first-person viewpoint, then when you get there the action switches to an isometric view (similar to EA's Desert Strike) to make it easier to bomb ground targets. Although you can choose which of your three aircraft to fly in each mission, if you crash you lose that plane for the rest of the game. ■

FACT

The Japanese version of Ultimate Air Combat was renamed Aces: Iron Eagle III to tie in with the low-budget Sonny Chiba movie of the same name. They otherwise have nothing to do with each other.

ULTIMATE BASKETBALL

Year 1990
Publisher Sammy
Developer Aicom

THIS IS JAPANESE developer Aicom's second NES basketball game, the first being Hoops. Whereas that game focused on two-on-two basketball and only takes place on one half of the court, Ultimate Basketball is a full 5-on-5 affair with fouls, free throws and the like. There are seven teams to choose from, all of which are fictional (New York Powers, Detroit Unions, Dallas Fighters and so on). Modes are limited – either play single matches or a two-game 'tournament' – but the gameplay is solid enough with special cut-scenes triggering when you attempt a dunk or free throw. These aren't just there for eye candy, they're actually mini-games: you have to stop a cursor as it passes over a line for your dunk or shot to go in the basket. ■

FACT

In real basketball no team can have fewer than five players. This doesn't apply in Ultimate Basketball, so it's possible end up with only a handful of players on the court if too many foul out.

THE UNCANNY X-MEN

Year 1989
Publisher LJN
Developer Unknown

ONE OF TWO NES games based on Marvel's mutants, this was developed for LJN by an unknown studio thought (but not confirmed) to be Atlus. Magneto and his band of henchmen are causing havoc so it's up to the X-Men to sort them out over five stages: the streets, underground, a robot factory, a starship and Magneto's control centre. Each stage lets you choose one of six X-Men – Wolverine, Cyclops, Storm, Colossus, Nightcrawler or Iceman – and another to follow behind you (or be controlled by a second player). The fifth stage is hidden: the cartridge label says 'B + Up together with Start' but this isn't the full code. The other step – holding the Select button – was supposed to appear in the game but was removed. ■

FACT

The game's last clue was supposed to make certain words in each end-of-level message turn red, to spell out: 'The last mission can be reached from the mission screen by pushing Select, and seek the advice of the label to make it to the final mission.'

UNCHARTED WATERS

Year	1991
Publisher	Koei
Developer	Koei

ANOTHER HISTORICAL SIMULATION from Koei, this time set during the Age of Exploration. You play as Leon Franco (the name can be changed), a 16-year-old Portuguese whose family has been going through some tough times. Deciding to seek his fortune, he becomes a sailor and heads off to find his destiny. At the end it turns out this destiny is your choice of three things: land, reputation or the hand of the Princess of Portugal. The point of Uncharted Waters is to gain success however you see fit, be that through trading, treasure hunting, war or piracy. It's a large game too: with 70 ports to visit and 15 other fleets sharing the seas with you, there's plenty of scope to enjoy your own unique adventure. ■

FACT

Uncharted Waters may not have been a huge success in the west but it gained a healthy following in East Asia. A total of five main games in the series were released, along with an online version.

UNINVITED

Year	1991
Publisher	Kemco
Developer	ICOM Simulations

UNINVITED WAS THE second of ICOM's MacVenture point-and-click games, but the third to be ported to the NES (after Deja Vu and Shadowgate). This one opens with you and your sister driving down a country road. After a shadowy figure appears, you swerve and crash into a tree. When you awaken your sister is gone, so you head to a nearby (haunted) mansion to try and find her. Oh, and your car bursts into flames, just in case you were thinking of leaving. The game has a standard point-and-click interface, along with a series of commands you can choose to interact with the environment (examine, take, open, close, use, hit, leave and speak). It ends rather underwhelmingly, with you throwing water on a demon. ■

FACT

The fourth and final MacVenture game, Deja Vu II, was never released on NES. It did, however, get a port on the Game Boy Color, ensuring all four were at least available on one of Nintendo's systems.

THE UNTOUCHABLES

Year	1991
Publisher	Ocean
Developer	Ocean

BRIAN DE PALMA'S classic gangster movie starring Kevin Costner, Sean Connery and Sean Connery's horrendous accent was reimagined as an NES game a few years after its theatrical release. Playing as US Secret Agent Eliot Ness (Costner), you have to lead your elite crimebusters through Chicago in search of Al Capone. The game consists of seven stages and is split into side-scrolling platform sections and lightgun-style shooting sections where you also control your character (similar to Cabal). There were two versions of The Untouchables on the NES: the first featured art from the film poster on the cover, while the second (released in 1993) featured more generic Costner-free artwork. Other than a new title screen, the re-release also swaps levels 2 and 3. ■

FACT

Sean Connery won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for his role in *The Untouchables*, but in 2003 an Empire magazine poll in the UK decided his Irish accent in the film was the worst in movie history.

URBAN CHAMPION

Year	1986
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D1

IN 1984 NINTENDO released a Game & Watch game called Boxing. It was a two-player game where players had to punch their opponent enough times to knock them back against the ropes, then do so again to knock them down. This formula was borrowed for Urban Champion, an early NES game about a one-on-one street fight. As in Boxing, players can block and punch either high or low: the aim is to keep hitting your opponent, knocking them back until they stumble off the side of the screen and onto the next street. Do this enough times and you'll reach a manhole at the end of the road: knock your opponent in there to win. Urban Champion had charm but even in 1986 it was criticised for lacking depth. ■

FACT

The arcade version, VS Urban Champion, is extremely rare and only a few cabinets are known to exist. The game is similar, only offering different music and a new scoring system.

VEGAS DREAM

Year 1990
Publisher HAL Laboratory
Developer HAL Laboratory

THIS CASINO GAME developed by HAL has a couple of extra quirks that make it stand out from the others. At its core it offers fairly straightforward renditions of four gambling activities: blackjack, roulette, slot machines or keno. Where things get interesting, though, is the strange scenarios that randomly take place while you're in the casino. These are gambling games themselves, as your decision can randomly result in either good or bad news. For example, a woman could tell you that she's fallen in love with you and ask to marry you. If you accept, she may be legit – at which point the casino will give you $5,000 as a wedding gift – or she may be a crook who'll steal some of your money. ■

FACT

Another odd scenario: a casino worker will tell you there's a phone call for you. If you accept it you'll either be given $500 by the caller, or a chandelier will fall on your head while you're talking.

VICE: PROJECT DOOM

Year 1991
Publisher Sammy
Developer Aicom

YOU ARE VICE officer Quinn Hart, out on a mission to find out more about a mysterious green gel that was created by aliens hundreds of years ago but is potentially lethal to humans. Hart's partner Detective Reece disappeared while investigating the gel, so it's up to Hart to find out what's going on. The majority of Vice: Project Doom borrows a little from the Ninja Gaiden games, with its sword-based side-scrolling action, Hart's relatively acrobatic movements and a series of lengthy, detailed cutscenes. There are also some stages that feel less like Tecmo's ninja series, however: these take the form of top-down driving sections and light gun style shooting stages which, while infrequent, help mix things up a bit. ■

FACT

The North American version of Vice is censored. The Japanese version has a cutscene with a key character being shot in the head, whereas the NA version has him recoiling from an explosion instead.

VIDEOMATION

Year 1991
Publisher THQ
Developer Western Technologies

AN EARLY EXAMPLE of a console art package, Videomation lets players create their own art using the NES controller. For the most part this consists of freehand drawing, which isn't the most accurate when you're using an eight-way D-Pad. Other tools let you draw straight lines, squares and circles, add text, or paint large areas. The 'video' in the title refers to the ability to create animations by choosing set examples – a boy walking, a girl skipping, a baby crawling – and either choosing a preset path for them to follow or controlling them directly with the D-Pad. Videomation was succeeded by Art Alive!, a follow-up game for the Mega Drive which replaced the generic animated characters with the likes of Sonic the Hedgehog and ToeJam & Earl. ■

FACT

THQ would dabble with art again in 2010 with the uDraw GameTablet, initially released for the Nintendo Wii. It was an enormous flop and contributed to THQ's eventual liquidation.

VOLLEYBALL

Year 1987
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1 / Pax Softnica

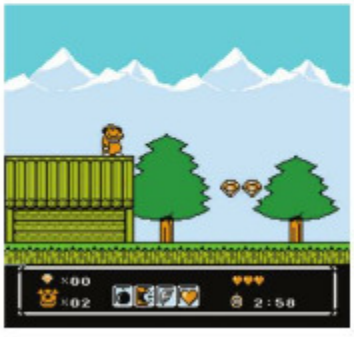
NINTENDO'S EARLY ATTEMPTS to try and recreate every sport imaginable continued with this take on that ever-popular love child of tennis and football. Volleyball offers standard six-on-six matches for either one or two players, as well as the option to play with men's teams or women's teams (the ball moves quicker when you're playing a men's match). There are eight national teams to choose between: from best to worst they're the USA, Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Japan, Brazil, South Korea and Tunisia. These rankings were determined by how well each country's team played in the 1981 and 1985 Volleyball World Cup. Volleyball was criticised for its confusing controls: it's never entirely clear which player you're controlling, meaning it's regarded as one of Nintendo's weakest sports games. ■

FACT

If the title screen music for Volleyball sounds familiar, that's because it was copied over from Baseball.

WACKY RACES

Year	1992
Publisher	Atlus
Developer	Atlus



HERE'S A BOLD move you may not have expected: the Wacky Races game for the NES doesn't have any actual racing in it. Instead, it's a platform game in which you play as everyone's favourite snickering dog, Muttley. There are three 'races' in the game, each consisting of a handful of platforming stages where Muttley has to make his way to the end and then face off against another racer (in their car) in a boss fight. Defeat all ten racers and, oddly, the game ends with Dick Dastardly and Muttley tied up for no clear reason. Since the game was developed in Japan, the game's music is based on the theme tune from the Japanese dub of Wacky Races. ■

FACT

Leave Muttley standing for a few seconds and he'll start doing his trademark snicker, complete with a low-fi NES sound effect rendition of it.

WALL STREET KID

Year	1990
Publisher	SOFEL
Developer	SOFEL

NOTHING SCREAMS 'LATE '80s America' like a video game based on the stock market. Wall Street Kid opens with a lawyer telling you that your distant uncle has died and that, as his only surviving relative, you may be able to inherit $600 billion in assets. First though, you're given $500,000 and have to turn a profit on the stock market by reaching various goals (starting by buying a million-dollar house within a month). The meat of the game literally involves checking the stock market and buying and selling shares in suspiciously familiar sounding companies like Yapple, YBM and Xearox. You're also encouraged to keep your girlfriend happy and stay healthy though, because 'remember: money isn't everything'. Says the Wall Street game. ■

FACT

Wall Street Kid is actually a sequel. Its predecessor, The Money Game, was only released in Japan, while Wall Street Kid is known as The Money Game II: The Miracle of Kabutochou there.

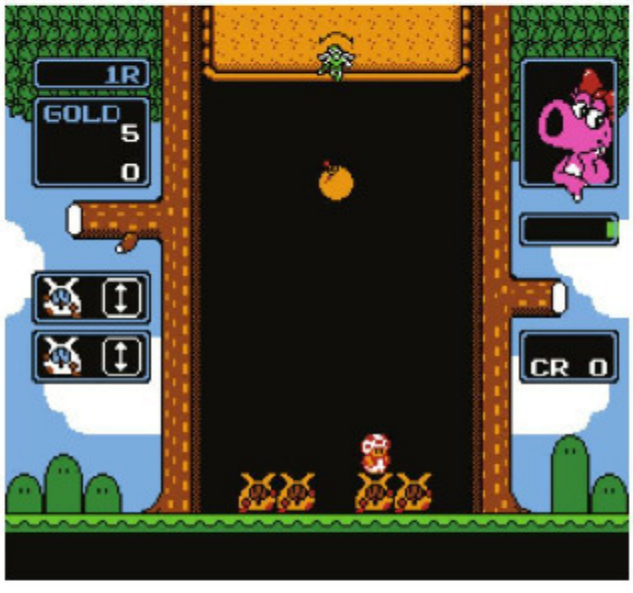
WARIO'S WOODS

Year	1994
Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	Nintendo R&D1

EVERY JOURNEY HAS to come to an end eventually, and the NES's journey in the United States came to an end on 10 December 1994 when Wario's Woods became the last ever officially licensed game released for the console.

The game is set in the Peaceful Woods, a once serene and calm area where any creatures who lived there were invariably of the cuddly variety. This all changes when Wario and his monsters invade, turning the community upside-down and renaming the area Wario's Woods. The unlikely hero is Toad, who arrives at Wario's Woods looking to destroy said monsters with a healthy supply of bombs (courtesy of a fairy called Wanda) so that peace can be restored.

An interesting mix between Dr. Mario and Super Mario Bros. 2, Wario's Woods is a match-three puzzle game where the twist is that instead of controlling falling objects you instead control Toad, who's running around at the bottom of the play area. Toad can pick up and drop monsters in an attempt to line up matching ones. You then have to drop a stack of monsters underneath one of the bombs Wanda drops, which blows them up. Some monsters can only be defeated with diagonal matches, or by being bombed twice.



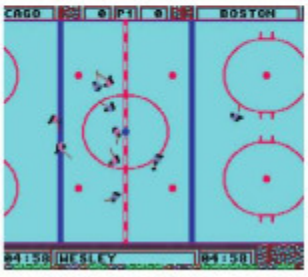
Although the idea is novel, Wario's Woods is perhaps a little too complicated for its own good and as a result this – combined with its appearance so late into the NES's life – means it generally isn't remembered as well as the likes of Tetris or Dr. Mario. ■

FACT

Wario's Woods is also notable for being the only NES game ever to receive an ESRB rating. The North American game ratings board started in September 1994, and Wario's Woods was the only NES game released after that date.

WAYNE GRETZKY HOCKEY

Year 1991
Publisher THQ
Developer Bethesda Softworks



THERE'S A REASON Wayne Gretzky was called 'The Great One': he was easily the best ice hockey player who ever lived, and holds well over 50 NHL records. Not only is he the only NHL player to score 200 points in a season, he did it four times. He's the dream name to secure for your ice hockey game, so fair play to THQ for sorting it out. Wayne Gretzky Hockey only features ten teams, but they all have real player names. As well as 1P vs CPU matches, you can also play 1P vs 2P or have both 1P and 2P on the same team against a CPU opponent. Sadly, that's pretty much it: there are no league or tournament modes to play through. ■

FACT

Although the game's main menu lets you choose between Exhibition and Playoff mode, all this does is determine whether tied games end in a draw or overtime.

WAYNE'S WORLD

Year 1993
Publisher THQ
Developer Radical Entertainment

WAYNE'S WORLD WAS a '90s comedy gem, but its plot didn't really lend well to a video game. That's probably why the NES version makes very little sense. In order to save their show from being taken over by a rich Chicago producer, Wayne and Garth have to make their way through five platforming stages filled with the likes of ninjas, cats, spiders and sentient musical instruments, for reasons that are never fully explained. Of the two, Garth is easiest to control: he's armed with a taser gun that lets him attack enemies from a distance, whereas Wayne has a mere kick at his disposal. It's generally agreed that Wayne's World is one of the weaker movie tie-ins of its era, which is saying a lot. ■

FACT

The SNES got a different Wayne's World game in which you only played as Wayne, who had to travel through a video game world in search of the kidnapped Garth. It wasn't much better.

WCW: WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

Year 1990
Publisher FCI
Developer Nichibutsu

WHILE THE WORLD of professional wrestling in the '80s and early '90s was dominated by the WWF, there was still some healthy competition in the form of media mogul Ted Turner's WCW (set up in 1988). The NES game was developed by Japanese studio Nichibutsu and is a westernised version of their Famicom game Super Star Pro Wrestling. It has 12 playable wrestlers to choose from: Ric Flair, Sting, Lex Luger, Mike Rotunda, the Road Warriors, Steve Williams, Kevin Sullivan, Ricky Steamboat, Ric Steiner, Eddie Gilbert and Michael P. S. Hayes. Beat every other wrestler in the single-player mode and you'll face off against the 'WCW Master', an enormous hidden character in a rubber bondage mask who's at least twice the size of anyone else in the game. ■

FACT

The voice sample saying 'World Championship Wrestling' on the title screen is provided by Paul Heyman, who continued to be a popular wrestling manager and advocate for decades to follow.

WEREWOLF: THE LAST WARRIOR

Year 1990
Publisher Data East
Developer SAS Sakata / Data East

THE WORLD HAS been taken over by Dr Faryan, a mad professor who's created a batch of bio-monsters who've imprisoned the entire population. Human weapons are useless to stop them: the only person who can is Chief War Wolf. He's been given the powers of the Great Spirit, which means if he collects five red 'W' symbols he can transform from human into werewolf, greatly enhancing his power and letting him crawl, backflip, climb walls and walk on the ceiling. Collecting small white power bubbles also builds your 'anger' meter: get five of these and you'll become the even more powerful Super Werewolf. Beat the game to be treated to a ridiculous yet brilliant image of a werewolf holding an American flag aloft. ■

FACT

The game ends with an image of Dr Faryan, and the message 'next time'. Naturally, there never was a next time.

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

Year 1988
Publisher GameTek
Developer Rare

SINCE THE NES got four games based on *Jeopardy!* it's perhaps no surprise that America's other blockbuster game show of the same era, *Wheel of Fortune*, also got a quartet of releases over the course of the console's life (and, as with *Jeopardy!*, the first three were developed by Rare). The first entry contains more than 1,000 different puzzles, and consists of two normal rounds, a speed-up round and the final round, where the winner gets to play for a grand prize (options include a sports car, boat or deluxe furniture). There were two versions of this game: they're identical except for one puzzle, which is changed in the re-release from 'I Can't Get No Relief' to 'I Don't Get No Respect'. ■

FACT

The cartridge's data contains two Coca-Cola logos, which ended up being unused. It seems the game was originally going to include Coke sponsorship.

WHEEL OF FORTUNE: JUNIOR EDITION

Year 1989
Publisher GameTek
Developer Rare

AS STRAIGHTFORWARD AS Wheel of Fortune is as a concept, the first NES game was maybe a little too difficult for younger gamers. After all, with possible answers including 'Copernicus', 'Versailles Treaty' and 'Muscular Dystrophy Association', it's fair to say children didn't really have an even playing field. The Junior Edition remedies this with another 1,000 or so puzzles, this time designed for kids aged seven and up. Say goodbye to 'Secretary of the Interior' and 'Better Business Bureau', and say hello to 'Alice in Wonderland', 'Kentucky Fried Chicken' and 'May the Force Be With You'. Naturally, some of the answers are now a little dated for today's children, including 'Video Cassette Recorder', 'The California Raisins' and 'Punky Brewster'. ■

FACT

The prizes in the Junior Edition are more kid-friendly, so instead of deluxe furniture and sports cars, players can win a shopping spree or a ten-speed bike.

WHEEL OF FORTUNE: FAMILY EDITION

Year 1990
Publisher GameTek
Developer Rare

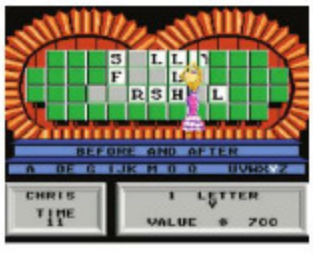
WITH THEIR THIRD Wheel of Fortune game, GameTek and Rare attempted to go down the Goldilocks route by making a game that catered to both the older audiences of the original game and the younger players of the Junior Edition. The result is the Family Edition, which features a fresh set of over 1,000 puzzles which are intended to be answerable by players young and old alike without alienating anybody. Quite how successful this is depends on your own opinion: with answers ranging from the simple 'Central Park', 'Buck Rogers' and 'Rocky Balboa' to the somewhat more obscure 'Exxon Valdex Oil Spill', 'Troilus and Cressida' and 'Guayaquil, Ecuador', it could probably be argued that youngsters may still struggle a bit here. ■

FACT

Prizes to choose from this time include an emerald necklace, a Caribbean cruise, a Bentley or a Concorde to London.

WHEEL OF FORTUNE: FEATURING VANNA WHITE

Year 1992
Publisher GameTek
Developer GameTek



AFTER MAKING THREE Jeopardy! games, Rare moved on to other ventures, leaving GameTek to completely revamp things for the fourth edition. That's exactly what happened with Wheel of Fortune too, with GameTek taking over developmental duties and entirely overhauling the game's look (including the addition of the same caricature-like player avatars it introduced in Super Jeopardy!). As the title suggests, the main addition here – along with 1,000 all-new questions, of course – is the presence of Vanna White, who revealed the letters in the real-life version of *Wheel of Fortune* on US television. Sample answers this time include 'The Battle of New Orleans', 'The New England Patriots', 'Princess of Wales' and 'An American Werewolf in London'. ■

FACT

Vanna White became the hostess of *Wheel of Fortune* in late 1982 and has continued to do the same role ever since. She's currently contracted to do so until 2020.

WHERE IN TIME IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

Year 1991
Publisher Konami
Developer Distinctive Software

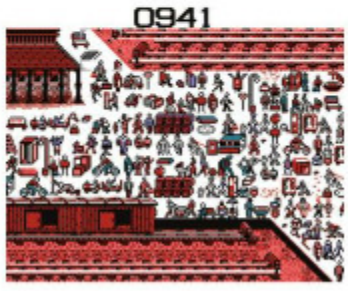
VERY FEW GAMES in the 'edutainment' genre end up being enjoyable but the Carmen Sandiego series of games are generally entertaining. Where in Time is the fourth entry (and the only one on the NES), following Where in the World, Where in the USA and Where in Europe. Carmen Sandiego is a criminal mastermind, and she and her international band of thieves have been travelling through time, stealing important artefacts (including Don Quixote's lance and Napoleon's hat). The player has to follow the trail they've left behind, using clues in each location to do research and figure out where to travel next. To help with this research, the NES version came with a free copy of The New American Desk Encyclopedia. ■

FACT

There were over 20 games in the Carmen Sandiego series, eight of which used the classic 'Where in X is' formula: The World, The USA, Europe, Time, North Dakota, America's Past, Space and a Junior Detective Edition.

WHERE'S WALDO?

Year 1991
Publisher THQ
Developer Bethesda Softworks



THIS TAKE ON Martin Handford's popular children's book (known as *Where's Wally?* in the UK and Australia) is considered by some to be one of the worst-looking games on the NES. It takes place over eight levels: a train station, a forest, a cave, a fairground, a city, a subway, a castle and a launch pad. The aim in most of them is to find Waldo, but there's also a block-turning puzzle and a slot machine game in there. The game was critically panned for having tiny, hard-to-decipher sprites, which made finding Waldo near-impossible at times (especially in the Normal and Hard difficulty levels, where he sometimes changes colour for no apparent reason). It was followed by The Great Waldo Search, found elsewhere in this book. ■

FACT

Many translations of the *Where's Wally* books give Wally/Waldo a different name. In Afrikaans he's known as Willie, in Germany he's Walter and in France you can call him Charlie.

WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT

Year 1989
Publisher LJN
Developer Rare

DISNEY'S LANDMARK FILM *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* blended animation and live action in a way that had never been seen before, and became a blockbuster hit as a result. The NES tie-in was developed by Rare and puts players in control of Eddie Valiant, Bob Hoskins' character in the movie. Exploring the LA streets, the park, ToonTown and the Warehouse District, you have to investigate numerous buildings and environments for two key things: the four missing pieces of the will that guarantees ToonTown's future, and the weaponry needed to defeat the evil Judge Doom at the end of the game. Don't bother looking up a walkthrough online, though: the items change locations every time you play, meaning you can't just learn the path and speed through. ■

FACT

In the Ink & Paint Club you find a phone number. When the game was originally out this was a real-life number for a tips line read by Jessica Rabbit. Nowadays, though, the number belongs to a sex line.

WHOMP 'EM

Year 1991
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Jaleco

WHOMP 'EM IS one of the first ever games featuring a Native American as a protagonist, though while this is a noble feat the title should probably make it clear that it still isn't the most culturally sensitive game ever created. You play as Soaring Eagle, who has to travel the land looking for totems for his magic pouch. After beating the first stage, you can choose to play through the next six stages in any order, similar to Mega Man. Also similar to Capcom's game, beating these levels gives you a totem which acts as a new weapon, so the order in which you complete the stages determines the order in which you get you weapons. Finish the game to see your completed totem pole in all its glory. ■

FACT

Whomp 'Em is a play on words. It refers to wampum, a type of bead made by the Native American tribes of the Eastern Woodlands. Colonists used to use wampum as currency when trading with them.

WIDGET

Year 1992
Publisher Atlus
Developer Graphic Research

WIDGET IS ONE of those '90s cartoons that lay dormant in the brains of those who watched it and was never recalled again until decades later they bought a book about NES games that asked them: 'Hey, remember Widget?' The titular purple alien is a World Watcher, dedicated to protecting all living creatures on Earth, who has to come down to our planet to take out five evil-doers. After the first stage, Widget takes a leaf out of Mega Man's book (like so many other NES games) and lets you choose which order to play through the next three stages. And yes, he can also gain new powers every time he beats a boss: in this case it's the ability to transform into a cannon, mouse, golem, bird and dolphin. ■

FACT

In the cartoon, **Widget** was voiced by Russi Taylor, who also provided the voices for the likes of Minnie Mouse, Strawberry Shortcake and Huey, Dewey and Louie in DuckTales.

WILD GUNMAN

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1 / Intelligent Systems

WILD GUNMAN WAS originally a live-action arcade game released in the mid-'70s, where players fired at real footage of a Wild West cowboy projected onto a screen. This 8-bit rendition launched alongside the NES, with wannabe gunslingers brandishing their Zapper instead. There are three game types: Game A puts you against a single gunman and asks you shoot him when he says 'fire'. Game B has you facing against two of them, and only one says 'fire' (making it harder for players to cheat by keeping their gun pointed at the target). Game C is more of a shooting gallery set outside a saloon, where gunmen appear at random doors and windows. You have to kill 10 with 15 shots to move onto the next stage. ■

FACT

An arcade version of the NES Wild Gunman (which never existed) appears in the 'future' in *Back to the Future Part 2*. On that day in real life, Nintendo added Wild Gunman to the Wii U Virtual Console service.

WILLOW

Year 1989
Publisher Capcom
Developer Capcom

ALSO KNOWN AS 'the film with Warwick Davis in it that wasn't *Return of the Jedi*, *Leprechaun* or *Harry Potter*', *Willow* was a brilliant fantasy movie produced by George Lucas. The video game adaptation puts you in the tiny shoes of Willow Ufgood (Davis), a diminutive farmer from the Nelwyn village who's chosen by the tribe's wizard to leave his family and friends behind and stop the evil queen Bavmorda. The game looks and plays similarly to The Legend of Zelda, but also includes more RPG-like elements like experience points, numerous types of sword and the ability to gain various magic spells. It isn't exactly faithful to the film, but it's perhaps a better game for it because it allows for more action. ■

FACT

Resident Evil creator Shinji Mikami once told Japanese magazine Weekly Famitsu that when he joined Capcom in 1990 he was given a free copy of Wiilow, as was every other new employee.

WIN, LOSE OR DRAW

Year 1990
Publisher Hi Tech Expressions
Developer Riedel Software Productions

WHEN YOUR GAME show revolves around drawing pictures and you want to recreate it on a system that only has a D-Pad and buttons, there's a good chance it's going to lose something special along the way. That's sadly the case with Win, Lose or Draw, based on the popular celebrity-based game show in which contestants have to guess what their teammates are sketching on a large pad of paper. The NES version tries to get around this with two styles of play: you can either let the game draw the pictures for you (which sort of defeats the point of the game), or you can try your best to draw one of the 218 puzzles with the NES controller instead. ■

FACT

If you choose the hardest difficulty setting then enter 'SHOWMERSPINC' as a guess during the game, you'll see a digitised photo of the three-man development team.

WINTER GAMES

Year 1987
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Atelier Double

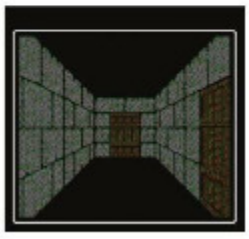
ALTHOUGH CALIFORNIA GAMES was Epyx's most popular 'Games' title, it was actually a spin-off of two other releases based on the Olympics. The first of these, Summer Games, didn't make to the NES but its sequel Winter Games did. There are four events to choose from here: Hot Dog Aerials, Speed Skating, Figure Skating and the Bobsled. Players can choose to either practice one of these events on its own, or take part in all four in an Olympics-style contest complete with an opening torch-lighting ceremony. Compared to other versions of Winter Games, the NES port is generally agreed to be substandard due to its unresponsive controls, poor graphics and meagre selection of events (other versions featured up to eight). ■

FACT

Although Winter Games doesn't have the official Winter Olympics licence, the manual still lists the previous locations of the Winter Olympics leading up to Calgary 1988.

WIZARDRY: PROVING GROUNDS OF THE MAD OVERLORD

Year 1990
Publisher Nexoft
Developer Game Studio



WIZARDRY WAS INITIALLY released on the Apple II back in 1981, and was considered a huge influence on later RPGs like Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior. It's a first-person dungeon crawler (before that term even existed), where you control a group of adventurers who are out to prove themselves to Trebor, the Mad Overlord. His special amulet has gone missing, and whoever finds it will be 'rewarded with great riches and much distinction', so off you and your party go to get it back from the great wizard Werdna. At the start of the game you can choose each party member's race (human, elf, dwarf, gnome or Hobbit) and their class (fighter, mage, cleric, thief, wizard, samurai, lord and ninja). ■

FACT

The names Trebor and Werdna are Robert and Andrew backwards. Robert Woodhead and Andrew C. Greenberg are the game's designers.

WIZARDRY II: KNIGHT OF DIAMONDS

Year 1992
Publisher ASCII Entertainment
Developer Game Studio

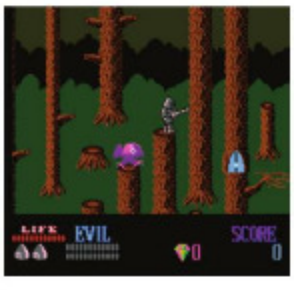
THE SECOND WIZARDRY game plays similarly to its predecessor, and continues the story from where it left off. This time your party has to find the staff of Gnilda, a magical stick that previously protected the city of Llylgamyn from attack. The staff created a forcefield around the city that only allowed in friendly faces, but the problem was it had no effect on Llylgamyn's citizens. Typically, one such resident – the evil Davalpus – decides to overthrow the castle and kill most of the royal family. In the resulting melee Davalpus, the hero Alavik and the staff all disappear into a massive crater where the castle once stood, so it's up to your party to return the staff before the city falls. No pressure. ■

FACT

There were eight main games in the Wizardry series. The final one, cleverly named Wizardry 8, was released on PC and Mac in 2001.

WIZARDS & WARRIORS

Year 1987
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Rare



THIS ACTION PLATFORMER by Rare puts you in the armour of Kuros, a knight warrior on a mission to rescue a princess from Wizard Malkil, a once-great magician who's gone mad with age. The route Kuros has to take consists of eight stages packed with monsters, but thankfully he's armed with the Brightsword, a deadly weapon capable of fending off anything. Throughout his quest Kuros comes across all manner of useful items, some of which remain permanently with him: these include the Dagger of Throwing (which comes back like a boomerang), the Shield of Protection, the Feather of Feather Fall (which lets you descend slowly after jumps), the Potion of Levitation (which lets you float) and the Axe of… well, it's just called the Axe. ■

FACT

Wizards & Warriors featured in an episode of Nintendo's cartoon series *Captain N: The Game Master*, in which Mother Brain from Metroid and Dr Wily from Mega Man team up with Malkil.

WIZARDS & WARRIORS III: KUROS:VISIONS OF POWER

Year 1992
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Zippo Games / Rare

THE THIRD WIZARDS & Warriors game (after Ironsword, found earlier in this book) was once again handled by Zippo Games on behalf of Rare. Malkil is back – despite having now been roundly thrashed twice – and this time he's taken over control of the once peaceful city of Piedup. Kuros, who following the second game has lost his memory, his armour and his pride, has to regain all of these and head to Piedup to destroy Malkil once and for all. Visions of Power has much more of a focus on exploration and story than the first two games, with side missions like returning statues to various guilds in order to unlock knight, thief and wizard disguises (and the abilities that come with them). ■

FACT

The game ends with the message that 'Malkil shall return', but Zippo Games closed its doors before its release and a fourth game never materialised.

WOLVERINE

Year 1991
Publisher LJN
Developer Software Creations

LET'S FACE IT, Wolverine is probably most people's favourite *X-Men* character (X-Man?), so a standalone platformer starring the man himself was a no-brainer. The game opens with Wolverine waking up on a desert island and discovering a huge building right in the middle. Turns out it was built by Sabertooth with the sole intention of destroying Wolverine for good. There are nine stages in total, most of which are referred to as trials: The First Trial, Trial by Air, Trial by Traps and so on. Along the way you can call on three fellow X-Men – Havok, Jubilee and Psylocke – to help you out for a short while. The eighth stage has you facing off against Magneto, before you reach level 9 for your final showdown with Sabertooth. ■

FACT

At the end you're treated to a single image of Wolverine, followed by the teasing message: 'The end?' Turns out yes, yes it was.

WORLD CHAMP

Year 1991
Publisher Romstar
Developer Pixel

WORLD CHAMP (OR World Champ: Super Boxing Great Fight as the title screen adorably puts it) is a boxing game that looks similar to Data East's Ring King. After entering your character's name, you're given your stats for speed, stamina, defence and punch power (all of which start off at just one point each), and are then thrown into your first bout against welterweight weakling Mighty Lee. The aim is to fight your way up all four weight categories, defeating a total of 20 boxers along the way with names like Rebel Ron, Money Man and Jumbo Joe. The final match is against the suspiciously Tyson-esque Hard Head: beat him to win the heavyweight championship and become 'the undisputed champion of the world'. ■

FACT

If you beat the game you'll own the welterweight, middleweight, cruiserweight and heavyweight world titles, despite the fact this isn't actually possible.

WORLD CLASS TRACK MEET

Year 1988
Publisher Bandai
Developer Human Entertainment

JUST AS BANDAI was releasing Stadium Events for the NES, Nintendo was deciding that Bandai's Family Fitness Mat would do great as an official Nintendo product. After doing a deal with Nintendo, Bandai agreed to pull all Family Fitness Mat products off the shelves – including the newly released Stadium Events – so that Nintendo could rebrand it the Power Pad. Also rebranded was Stadium Events: renamed World Class Track Meet, it was included as a free game with the Power Pad. Naturally, this means it's far less rare than it was in its original form: while boxed and mint copies of Stadium Events can sell for up to $35,000, you can find World Class Track Meet on eBay for about five bucks. ■

FACT

The Power Pad was also bundled with some NES consoles. These bundles came with a three-in-one cartridge including Super Mario Bros., Duck Hunt and World Class Track Meet.

WORLD GAMES

Year 1989
Publisher Milton Bradley
Developer Rare

AFTER SUMMER GAMES and Winter Games, Epyx decided to widen its reach a little and came up with World Games, a multi-event title comprised of lesser known sports from around the world. The NES version was ported over by Rare and consists of eight international events: weightlifting in Russia, barrel jumping in Germany, cliff diving in Mexico, slalom skiing in France, logrolling in Canada, bull riding in the US, sumo wrestling in Japan and the caber toss in Scotland. Each event comes with an optional 'travelogue', which is essentially a single screen telling you about the event's history and how it fits into that country's heritage. Because World Games was followed by the far more successful California Games, it's the latter that most long-time gamers remember. ■

FACT

Since the logrolling game is set in Canada, it opens with an 8-bit rendition of Monty Python's Lumberjack Song.

WRATH OF THE BLACK MANTA

Year 1990
Publisher Taito
Developer AI

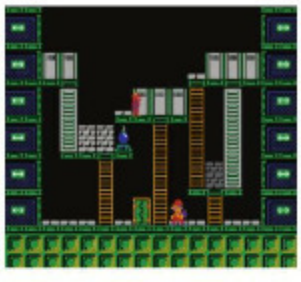
NEW YORK CITY has been gripped by a new criminal organisation called DRAT (Drug Runners And Terrorists). Not only are DRAT dealing drugs, they're kidnapping children too: a bit of a wide remit, really, but concerning nonetheless. They're on borrowed time, though, because crime-fighting ninja Black Manta is out to put a stop to them. Playing as the Black Manta himself, you have to fight through New York, Tokyo and Rio de Janeiro killing criminals before heading back to New York and finally reaching DRAT Headquarters. You're armed with special 'Ninpo Arts', which let you perform a variety of magical attacks, from shooting fire at enemies, to conjuring lightning, to even creating a clone of yourself to double-team someone. ■

FACT

The Japanese version, Ninja Cop Saizou, was released a year earlier. It's got more animations between stages and features an extra level, which was completely removed from the western version.

WRECKING CREW

Year 1985
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D1



IT'S WELL-KNOWN THAT Mario was a plumber (and a carpenter before that), but his brief stint as a demolition expert is less frequently documented. Wrecking Crew is a puzzle platformer in which Mario (or Luigi if you're Player 2) has to destroy all the doors, walls and ladders in each level. There are three things that make this tricky: the demolition site is plagued with monsters called Gotchawrenches and Eggplant Men, the annoying Foreman Spike keeps trying to mess things up, and if you don't destroy everything in the right order you might end up with some objects that are impossible to reach. There are 100 levels in total, as well as a Design mode which lets you create your own stages (but not save them). ■

FACT

Wrecking Crew had two sequels. The first was VS Wrecking Crew, an arcade version with new stages and simultaneous two-player. The second was Wrecking Crew '98, a SNES follow-up that only made it to Japan.

WURM: JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

Year 1991
Publisher Asmik
Developer Cyclone System

THIS AMBITIOUS SCI-FI game is set in the future (the year 1999) and tells the story of a group of marines who board a giant burrowing vehicle – nicknamed the Wurm – as they try to find out what happened to the four groups of scientists who headed out to investigate a dramatic increase of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions and disappeared. The game combines a number of different genres to keep things interesting as you play: sometimes you'll be playing through side-scrolling action platform stages, other times you'll be playing vertically or horizontally scrolling shoot 'em up stages as you pilot the Wurm through enemy-infested corridors. There are also light gun style shooting sections where you control screen movement too (similar to a first-person shooter). ■

FACT

The Japanese version of Wurm is called Vazolder: The Underground Battle Space. Vazolder is the name of the vehicle in Japan: this is referenced in Wurm's manual, which explains that Wurm is just a nickname and the vehicles are actually called VZRs.

WWF WRESTLEMANIA

Year 1989
Publisher Acclaim
Developer Rare

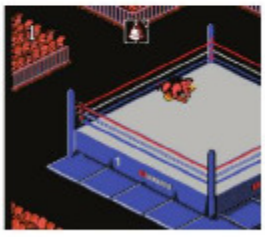
THE WILDLY POPULAR World Wrestling Federation (now known as WWE) has enjoyed countless video game adaptations over the years, four of which were on the NES. The first of these, WrestleMania, was handled by Rare. It offers six wrestlers to choose from, each of whom was a huge name in the late '80s: Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant, 'Macho Man' Randy Savage, the Honky Tonk Man, Bam Bam Bigelow and 'The Million Dollar Man' Ted DiBiase. Solo players can choose from a standard one-on-one bout or a Tournament mode, where they choose a wrestler and have to defeat the other five in a row to win the WWF Championship. There's also a multiplayer 'Tournament' mode for 2–6 players, which is essentially a league where all six wrestlers fight each other once. ■

FACT

The movie *The Wrestler* stars Mickey Rourke as a one-time legend of the ring. One scene in the film has him playing Wrestle Jam '88, a fake (but working) NES game based on WWF WrestleMania.

WWF WRESTLEMANIA CHALLENGE

Year 1990
Publisher LJN
Developer Rare



RARE'S SECOND AND final attempt at a WWF game switches the viewpoint from WrestleMania's side-on perspective to an isometric camera, letting the player use the entire ring instead of just moving back and forth. The number of wrestlers has increased from six to nine: this time players can choose between Hulk Hogan, the Ultimate Warrior, Brutus 'the Barber' Beefcake, Ravishing Rick Rude, 'Macho King' Randy Savage, Hacksaw Jim Duggan, Big Boss Man, Andre the Giant and, oddly, 'You'. The latter is a generic, skinny chap in shorts who apparently represents the player for some reason, and is the only playable character in the main Tournament mode. The main addition is Survivor Series mode, a three-on-three tag match where pinned wrestlers are eliminated and their teammates keep fighting. ■

FACT

During a Survivor Series match, each time a wrestler enters the ring their theme music starts play. The music for 'You' was also the title screen music for WWF Superstars on the Game Boy.

WWF WRESTLEMANIA: STEEL CAGE CHALLENGE

Year 1992
Publisher LJN
Developer Sculptured Software

WHEN ACCLAIM (UNDER its LJN brand) moved onto its third WWF game, Rare bowed out to be replaced with Sculptured Software. Steel Cage Challenge, as the name suggests, introduced cage matches to proceedings, and also changed the camera angle again to a straight-on viewpoint that's been used in most WWF/WWE games since. There are ten superstars to choose from here: Hulk Hogan, Roddy Piper, Sid Justice, Ted DiBiase, the Mountie, the Undertaker, Irwin R. Schyster, Jake 'the Snake' Roberts, Randy Savage and Bret Hart (rest in peace, 'You'). To win a cage match you have to either pin your opponent as normal, or climb over the top of the cage and escape while your opponent is lying on the mat. ■

FACT

The Sega Master System version of Steel Cage Challenges removes Jake Roberts, Sid Justice, Roddy Piper and the Mountie, and replaces them with Ric Flair, Papa Shango, Shawn Michaels and Tatanka.

WWF KING OF THE RING

Year 1993
Publisher LJN
Developer Gray Matter

THE FOURTH AND final WWF game on NES was handled by Canadian studio Gray Matter and was based on the annual eight-man King of the Ring tournament. This time the roster consists of eleven wrestlers: Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, Mr Perfect, Bret Hart, Shawn Michaels, Yokozuna, 'The Narcissist' Lex Luger, Razor Ramon, Bam Bam Bigelow and the Undertaker, along with the momentous return of 'You' (hooray!). This time you can rename 'You' and allocate him attribute points. Although the obvious new inclusion here is the King of the Ring tournament itself, there's still a traditional Tournament mode where you have to defeat every other superstar in the game to win the WWF Championship. If you play as 'You', each win gives you more stat points to allocate. ■

FACT

The Game Boy got its own version of King of the Ring, which has a similar array of features but removes the Undertaker and Bam Bam Bigelow.

XENOPHOBE

Year 1988
Publisher Sunsoft
Developer Sunsoft

XENOPHOBE WAS ORIGINALLY an arcade game developed by Bally Midway with a unique three-way split screen gimmick: this let three players play in the same game world and freely explore it without being constrained by others. This idea carries over to the NES version, albeit in a reduced two-player form, but the drawback is the split-screen is permanent, meaning single-player games are played with an enormous empty space at the bottom of the screen. The aim is to destroy as many aliens (known as Xenos) as possible before time runs out on each stage. If you've killed enough you'll be told the area is 'cleared of Xenos' and you'll get a bonus. There are eight stages in total, each ranging in size from 8–32 screens long. ■

FACT

There are three exterminators to choose from: Dr Kwack, Mr Fogg and Dr Zordirz. Dr Kwack is the most interesting, since he's a mutant duck.

XEVIOUS: THE AVENGER

Year 1988
Publisher Bandai
Developer Namco

ALTHOUGH XEVIOUS WASN'T the first vertically-scrolling shoot 'em up when it launched in arcades in 1983, it was certainly one of the first notable ones. By the time it made its way to the NES five years later the novelty had somewhat faded and it became just another vertical shooter among the many available on the system, but that's not to say it isn't still entertaining. You control the Solvalou, a fighter plane armed with enough firepower to take down the alien forces of planet Xevious. Since it's an early example of the genre, Xevious doesn't have things that would later become shoot 'em up staples (like power-ups). It does at least have two shot types: bullets for air enemies, and bombs for those on the ground. ■

FACT

Namco's Ridge Racer series features a number of fictional racing teams. One of these is Racing Team Solvalou, named after the Xevious ship.

XEXYZ

Year 1990
Publisher Hudson Soft
Developer Atlus

PRESUMABLY NAMED BY someone who wasn't forward-thinking enough to realise spell checkers and predictive text would be a thing in the future, Xexyz is part action platformer, part side-scrolling shoot 'em up. You play as Apollo, a battle-soldier from the nation of Xexyz who's upset because it's being attacked from space by the mechanic fortress Goruza (and probably because it's easier to pronounce). Apollo jumps into his battle suit and heads out to fight Goruza. There are twelve stages in total, and while they generally alternate between platforming and shoot 'em up sections the final boss instead switches to a third-person perspective where you see your ship from behind as you attempt to destroy Goruza's fortress once and for all. ■

FACT

In case you're wondering, you pronounce it 'zek-zees'.

YO! NOID

Year 1990
Publisher Capcom
Developer Now Production

THE NOID WAS a bizarre mascot created by Domino's Pizza in the mid '80s. He was supposed to represent all the challenges and obstacles Domino's employees faced when delivering a pizza in less than 30 minutes, but somewhere along the way that was seemingly forgotten because in this NES platformer the Noid is the hero, not a nuisance. Gangs of hoodlums and wild creatures are terrorising New York, and the mayor thinks the Noid's doppelganger Mr Green is behind it. It's up to the Noid to stop him. The game is a mix of standard platforming stages, whack-a-mole type levels, auto-scrolling sections where you ride a skateboard or gyrocopter, and a lengthy pizza-eating contest mini-game that shows remarkable constraint in not mentioning Domino's. ■

FACT

This wasn't actually the first Noid video game. Avoid the Noid was released on Commodore 64 and PC and had you playing as a pizza boy trying to reach the top of a tower while avoiding Noids.

YOSHI

Year 1992
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Game Freak

WHEN THE SNES launched in 1991 alongside Super Mario World, Nintendo fans immediately fell in love with Mario's new dinosaur pal Yoshi. NES owners who hadn't made the jump over to the SNES weren't able to enjoy the Yoshi love-in right away, but the following year they got this puzzler which ensured he could at least make a brief appearance in 8-bit form. You actually play as Mario (the European title is the more appropriate Mario & Yoshi), and you have to shuffle four columns of enemies to match up falling ones and make them disappear. The twist is that Yoshi eggs also fall from time to time: drop the top half of one onto a column including a bottom half and the two halves meet, removing anything in between. ■

FACT

Yoshi was developed by Game Freak, who a few years later would start to see modest success with a little-known gaming series called Pokémon.

YOSHI'S COOKIE

Year 1993
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Bullet-Proof Software

JUST IN CASE NES owners hadn't had their fill of dinosaur-related puzzling with Yoshi, the following year they got another taste with Yoshi's Cookie. This time the play area consists of five different types of cookie, and the player has to arrange them by shuffling rows and columns until they match up. If an entire row or column contains the same type of cookie, it disappears. The aim is to clear the whole screen, and to do it quickly (because over time, more cookies enter from the sides). After beating the first 10 stages you gain access to a harder mode where the cookies are replaced with enemies and there's a single shell, which can only be removed with a Yoshi cookie (which acts as a wild card). ■

FACT

Tetris DS on the Nintendo DS included a puzzle mode, which had a Yoshi's Cookie theme (complete with the original music).

THE YOUNG INDIANA JONES CHRONICLES

Year 1992
Publisher Jaleco
Developer Jaleco

THE FLASHBACK SEQUENCE in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, starring River Phoenix as a young Indy, led to a three-season TV series about the hero's other teenage adventures. This NES take on it is essentially two stories: first he travels to Mexico during a civil war and ends up trying to rescue hostages from Pancho Villa and retrieving an Egyptian artifact from an enemy called the Claw. Then he heads to France to fight in the First World War, which eventually takes him to Germany where he's tasked with bombing a German weapons facility. It ends with a 90-something Indy explaining that 'the Great War went on for another year, and a few million more lives were lost.' Thanks for the downer, Dr Jones. ■

FACT

In the TV series, young Indy was played by Sean Patrick Flanery, who would go on to play Connor MacManus in The Boondock Saints.

ZANAC

Year 1987
Publisher FCI
Developer Compile

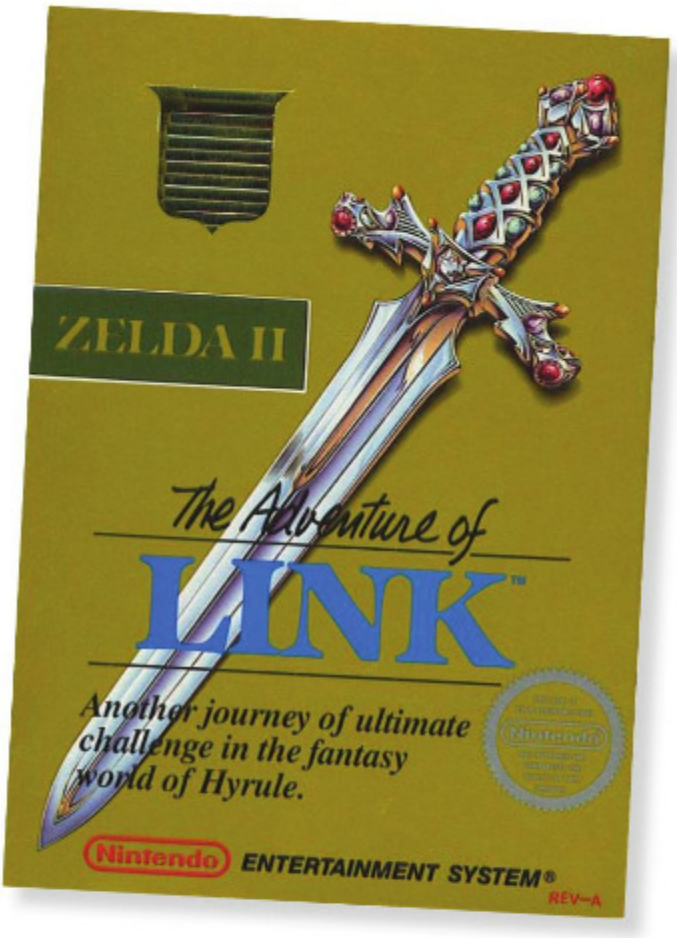
THIS IMPRESSIVELY SPEEDY vertically scrolling shoot 'em up may have been released relatively early in the NES's life, but could still hold its own graphically compared to most other shooters released in the half decade to follow. You play as the pilot of the AFX-6502 Zanac spaceship as you try to destroy a nameless 'system' created by a similarly nameless 'organic intelligence body'. There are 12 stages in total (most of which are split into sub-stages) and by the time you get to the end the background's moving so quickly it can get a little disorientating. Zanac boasts a feature called ALC, which stands for Automatic Level of Difficulty Control (despite the missing 'D'). This studies the player's ability and level of success and adjusts the difficulty accordingly. ■

FACT

Zanac has a strange cheat code which requires the Family Computer Keyboard. Even stranger, the keyboard was only ever released in Japan but the code only works on the North American version of the game.

ZELDA II: THE ADVENTURE OF LINK

Year 1988
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D4



THE LEGEND OF Zelda and Super Mario series have generally followed similar paths. Both debuted on the NES and revolutionised their respective genres; both pushed those genres even further on the SNES and both completely rewrote the rule book when they went polygonal with their Nintendo 64 debuts. Both continue to deliver critically acclaimed games, and (more recently) both debuted on the Nintendo Switch with legit Game of the Year contenders.

One other similarity many tend to forget, however, is that Nintendo – in the west, at least – attempted to take each series in a different direction with their second entries before moving back to the tried and tested formula for the third game. Super Mario Bros. 2 swapped jumping on Goombas' heads for throwing vegetables at Shy Guys, while Zelda II replaced the first game's top-down exploration with a side-on adventure that felt more like an RPG at times.

Zelda II opens in the North Castle of Hyrule, where Link is standing next to the sleeping Princess Zelda. This isn't the Zelda from the first game but a different Zelda, who's been trapped in a sleeping spell for generations. After discovering a Triforce shape on the back of his hand, Link is told by Zelda's nursemaid Impa that he's the chosen one and has to travel to the Great Palace to find the Triforce of Courage, which will break the spell and awaken the long-dormant princess.

FACT

Zelda II explains why the Hyrule timeline has so many princess Zeldas. After this particular Zelda was struck down with a sleeping spell, her brother the Prince of Hyrule ordered that all future royal females should be named Zelda.

While the first game's Hyrule was essentially a large expanse of land that gave access to a variety of caves and dungeons, Zelda II is the first in the series to paint Hyrule as a living kingdom, with numerous small towns inhabited by other characters. Speaking to townsfolk is encouraged this time, as it's how Link can discover new moves and learn magic spells.

The big difference, however, is the switch to side-scrolling adventuring. Whether Link's in a town, exploring a nearby palace or just engaged in one of the many random battles he'll encounter on the world map, the game mechanics are more like that of an action platformer, where Link can jump, slash and block enemy attacks. There's also an experience system for the first (and only) time in a Zelda game: defeating enemies gives Link XP which upgrade his attack power, his resistance to attack and his efficiency when using magic.

Although the side-on combat and the RPG-style experience system were ultimately scrapped – Nintendo went back to a top-down approach for the third game, A Link to the Past – Zelda II isn't a complete black sheep. It still introduced some features that have become Zelda staples over the years: not just the ability to visit villages, but also things like Link's mysterious dark doppelganger, the magic meter and the ability to learn new moves.

Zelda II's high difficulty and unconventional mechanics mean Zelda fans may struggle to penetrate the game's initially unwelcoming nature. But those who stick with it and make it to the end often find themselves enjoying an engaging and challenging entry in the Zelda family. ■

ZEN: INTERGALACTIC NINJA

Year 1993
Publisher Konami
Developer Konami

INITIALLY LAUNCHED AS a comic book series in 1987, Zen the Intergalactic Ninja was eventually turned into an NES game courtesy of Konami. An abandoned genetic experiment, Zen was discovered by the Masters of Om and trained to be a master martial artist and freelance mercenary. In the game, he's hired by the Gordons, a highly intelligent alien race who ask him to head to Earth to stop the evil Lord Contaminous turning the planet into a toxic waste dump. For the most part Zen is a side-scrolling platform game, but there are some stages where the action moves to an isometric viewpoint. There's also a mine cart stage which cleverly switches been both views (and yes, it's as difficult as most other games' mine cart stages are). ■

FACT

The European version of Zen moves the location of the Acid Rain Forest stage from South America to western Europe, presumably just to hit the message home harder.

ZODA'S REVENGE: STARTROPICS II

Year 1994
Publisher Nintendo
Developer Nintendo R&D3

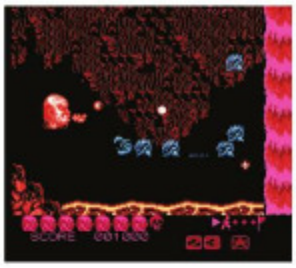
WARIO'S WOODS MAY have been the last official NES release in North America, but Zoda's Revenge was a close second. It's the sequel to western-only RPG StarTropics, and follows on from its events. After getting a telepathic message from Mica (the princess he rescued in the last game), our hero Mike heads to his archaeologist uncle's house with instructions on how to decipher a strange inscription on an alien pod. Unfortunately, reading the message sends Mike to the past. He has to work his way through time, where he meets the likes of Cleopatra, Sherlock Holmes, Leondaro da Vinci and Dracula, in search of Tetrads, special Tetris-shaped blocks that'll help send him back to the present. ■

FACT

When Zora's Revenge was re-released on the Wii U Virtual Console, the Tetrads were renamed Blocks, presumably to avoid any hassle from The Tetris Company.

ZOMBIE NATION

Year 1991
Publisher Meldac
Developer KAZe



NICE TO END with a crazy one. In the year 1999, an apparent meteorite crash in the Nevada desert turns out to be Darc Seed, an alien who turns America's citizens into zombies, brings the Statue of Liberty to life to fight for him and fires a magnetic ray that captures the legendary samurai sword Shura. When head of the samurai Hamakubi finds out, he uses his mystical powers to literally send his head out (well, a holographic version of it) to fly around America and destroy everything in sight. The result is easily the oddest side-scrolling shoot 'em up on the NES, in which you control said flying head as it fires lasers from its eyes and mouth while blowing up half of America. ■

FACT

The Japanese version is called Hooligan Tengu and has you playing as a Japanese tengu head instead. The Statue of Liberty also has a crown of snakes in this version.

MULTI-GAME CARTRIDGES

Year Various
Publisher Various
Developer Various

SO THERE YOU have it, 714 officially licensed NES games. In fact, it's only been 709, but that's because a handful of NES games are compilations of existing titles. Sesame Street 1-2-3 and A-B-C were moved to a single cartridge in 1991, while Nintendo had four different multi-game cartridges bundled with different NES hardware sets over the years: the most common featured Super Mario Bros. and Duck Hunt, while another had Super Mario Bros., Tetris and Nintendo World Cup. The Power Set came with a Zapper and Power Pad along with a cartridge containing Super Mario Bros., Duck Hunt and World Class Track Meet, while the NES Sports Set included an NES Four Score, four controllers and a 2 in 1 cart with Super Spike V'Ball and Nintendo World Cup. ■

FACT

The original PAL version of Super Mario Bros. ran slower than the NTSC one because of the difference in refresh rates (50Hz for PAL, 60Hz for NTSC). The Super Mario Bros. / Duck Hunt cart tried to fix this but made the music far too fast as a result.

UNLICENSED GAMES

Here's where things start to get a little crazy. The 714 games you've just read about were all officially licensed by Nintendo. As previously explained, Nintendo's licensing requirements were put in place to make sure NES games couldn't just be slapped together by any publisher who felt like it. That was the idea in theory, at least.

The NES contained a chip called the CIC, or Checking Integrated Circuit. This was a small lockout chip designed to make sure that only officially manufactured cartridges would work on the NES. The CIC used a system called 10NES, which essentially locked access to the console until it read a 'key' in the cartridge's software. Official cartridges made by Nintendo had this key, unofficial ones didn't.

This would have been fine if a workaround had never been discovered, but some were. Most publishers making unlicensed cartridges opted for brute force, creating circuits on the cartridge that attacked the CIC with a voltage spike. This led to a common situation

NINTENDO® GAMERS, START YOUR PULSES.
GAUNTLET
PAC-MAN
R.B.I. BASEBALL
THE SOVIET MIND GAME
TETRIS
TENGEN
Take a good look at the four games to your left. Can you feel your pulse racing? Your breath getting shorter?
Don't worry, it's a perfectly normal reaction to seeing so much fun and excitement at one time.
Now that your adrenaline is pumping properly, we proudly present the full line of hits from Tengen for the Nintendo Entertainment System®:
GAUNTLET. Yes, the legendary arcade hit is now available on the NES! Choose your hero from the same four characters: Thor, Thyra, Merlin or Questor. The unique 2-player option lets you join forces with a friend to defeat hordes of swarming monsters and to collect food, treasure and magic potions. We've also added a host of new features. Tengen's Gauntlet sends you on a noble quest: The recovery of a sacred orb lost somewhere in a huge universe known as the Five Worlds. Each World comes with bewildering mazes and untold dangers to challenge even the most skillful adventurer. Live all your sword-and-sorcery fantasies today!
R.B.I. BASEBALL. It's the only game on the NES that is officially licensed from the Major League Baseball Players Association. So when your lineup includes such power hitters as Don Mattingly or Andre Dawson, you're getting their actual stats and skills. And when Cy Young winners like Fernando Valenzuela and Roger Clemens wind up, they're pitching with their individual style, speed and stamina. Are you ready to play in the Major Leagues with real superstars? Then you're ready for R.B.I. BASEBALL!
PAC-MAN. The biggest hit of the decade is back — just for you! Guide PAC-MAN around the baffling maze to gobble all the dots and rack up points in a big way. Blinky, Pinky, Inky and Clyde, the not-so-friendly ghosts, are dying to do some gobbling, too. Except their favorite food is PAC-MAN! His only defense is to eat the energizers, special pellets which empower him to gobble the ghosts, but only for a short while. Find out for yourself how the ever-lovable PAC-MAN captured the hearts of millions of people around the world!
TETRIS. The first game software from the Soviet Union is an intense battle of wits. Rotate and flip moving geometric blocks into unbroken rows. When you fill up a row, it disappears from the screen and your score rises. Nothing to it, right? Wrong! When you can't find the way to make the pieces fit together and more blocks tumble down ever faster, you'll wish you had ten hands — and ten brains. Play this addictive mind game by yourself, against a friend or against the computer.
You better stop reading now or you're liable to overheat from sheer anticipation.
Save some of that energy for running to your local dealer so you can play the games today!
TENGEN
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where starting up an unlicensed game would result in the NES starting up multiple times as the voltage spike displaced the authentication.

Atari – who published unofficial NES games under its subsidiary company Tengen – went for a more sophisticated approach (though one that was no less sneaky). It contacted the US Patent and Trademark Officer and asked for the source code for the lockout chip, claiming it needed it to defend against infringement claims in a legal case. With the source code for the lockout chip, Atari was able to make its own 'key', nicknamed Rabbit. Instead of trying to kick the door open like other publishers did with its voltage spikes, Rabbit simply acted like the key on official NES cartridges, sending the 10NES software the exact data it was looking for to allow the game to load.

In case it isn't already clear, this section of the book is basically the Wild West. The relatively straightforward line-up of games you've seen to this point is about to descend into an eclectic mix of unlicensed nonsense. Granted, some of what you see here will be fairly conventional: a couple of established publishers like Atari (as Tengen) and Codemasters chose to release unlicensed games simply because they didn't want to play along with Nintendo's regulations, and as such the majority of their games are of a high quality that could easily have been in the licensed section of this book instead had it not been for a refusal to sign on a dotted line.

The majority of the games here, however, are a bit of a mish-mash. Expect to see it all: Taiwanese mahjong games, shameless rip-offs of popular titles, Christian-focused platformers, gory light gun games, outright broken software and an unusually large number of titles that feature nudity (you won't see any of it here, so don't worry/complain).

The lawless nature of the unlicensed NES game landscape makes cataloguing them infinitely more difficult. Some games were released in various different countries under completely different titles: you may have owned Double Strike, but elsewhere it was known as Twin Eagle. Others were released in such small numbers, and exclusively in countries like Brazil and Spain, that they're still being discovered by collectors to this day.

That's not to mention the literally countless multi-game cartridges, in which a publisher jammed as many bootleg, pirated and unofficial NES games as possible onto a cart. You can find anything from 2 in 1 to 400 in 1 carts, but listing these would not only be mind-numbingly boring, but next to impossible.

Meanwhile, there's been a new wave of homebrew developers releasing their own brand new NES games on cartridges (like Mega Cat Studios with its 2017 horror boxing game Creepy Brawlers), while some publishers have started releasing new compilation cartridges of older games (such as the Data East All-Star Collection, a 2017 release featuring five classic Data East NES games).

With all of the above in mind, some rules had to be established in order to give this section some sort of structure. There are a total of 162 games over the following pages, which cover the vast majority of known unlicensed NES games that meet the following criteria: firstly, they must have been released on a standalone cartridge during the NES's active life (up to and including 1995). Secondly, they must be original games and not just pirated versions of licensed titles. Thirdly, with only some notable exceptions, multi-game cartridges aren't included. With that said, enjoy the madness.

2 IN 1 COSMOCOP

Year 1993
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

THIS PAIR OF Zapper games by Taiwanese developer Sachen (also known as Thin Chen and Joy Van) are joined by the same premise: the year is 20XX and 'the most intelligent and sophisticated biotech-monsters' are attacking. The first game, Cosmocop, is a scrolling light gun game set on the planet Sinik, where you have to save its people from 'the biotech robot'. The second, Cyber Monster, is set on a single screen and says the aim is to kill the creatures attacking a biology lab to prevent 'mass multiplication'. In reality, it's just an extremely difficult game in which enemies and helpless girls saying 'oh, no' appear and the player has a fraction of a second to decide whether to shoot them. ■

FACT

Under its various guises, Sachen developed around 70 unique games for the NES and Famicom.

2 IN 1 TOUGH COP

Year 1993
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

ALTHOUGH TECHNICALLY A two-in-one cartridge, the two Zapper games on offer here are pretty much the same game with different levels. Game one, Tough Cop, has you visiting two different stages to take out a pair of criminals. First is a trip to the jungle to kill Jackson, who's 'wanted for killing ten cops', then it's off to a nondescript rocky area to get George, a 'member of a Colombian drug dealing group'. The second game, Super Tough Cop, is more of the same and has you travelling to the Middle East to shoot a terrorist called Bill, followed by a moving train where your target is Sambun, 'a gang leader in the USA'. After shooting a set number of enemies in each stage, the boss appears. ■

FACT

Most of Sachen's games had series numbers, in case you were dedicated enough to collect them. 2 in 1 Tough Cop is SA-024, for example.

3 IN 1 SUPERGUN

Year 1993
Publisher Micro Genius
Developer TXC Corp

ANOTHER ZAPPER COMPILATION from a Taiwanese studio, TXC Corporation's 3 in 1 Supergun contains a trio of basic shooting galleries. Clown (referred to as Clowr on the main menu) has you shooting bottles out of the sky as a clown tries to juggle them: shooting a certain number lets you play the next stage. The second game is Snake Charmer, although when you choose it the title screen says Gun Fighter instead. You're presented with 12 vases and have to shoot the blue snakes that come out of them, whack-a-mole style, while avoiding the red ones. Finally there's the Hogan's Alley-inspired Shooter, which gives you three cardboard targets and asks you to quickly shoot the two criminals while avoiding the innocent bystander. ■

FACT

The box promises 'the pursuit of wealth, power and eternal life'. Which is a lot to promise for a few rubbish light gun games.

ACTION 52

Year 1991
Publisher Active Enterprises
Developer Active Enterprises

ALTHOUGH THERE WERE countless unlicensed multi-game carts for the NES, Action 52 deserves special attention. Retailing for an eye-watering $199, Active Enterprises promised 52 'new and original' games on the cartridge and to its credit, it delivered. The problem is, pretty much every game is terrible. The most infamous is The Cheetahmen (listed in the manual as Action Gamemaster), a Ninja Turtles knock-off in which a bunch of anthropomorphic cheetahs fight off all the enemies from the other 51 games. Also of note is Ooze, a platformer that formed part of a competition: everyone who beat level 8 would be entered into a prize draw to win $52,000 and a $52,000 scholarship. The game crashed on the second level, making this impossible. ■

FACT

A second version of Action 52 was made for the Sega Mega Drive, and featured mostly different games (as well as a new Cheetahmen adventure, of course).

ADAM & EVE

Year 1992
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer Mega Soft

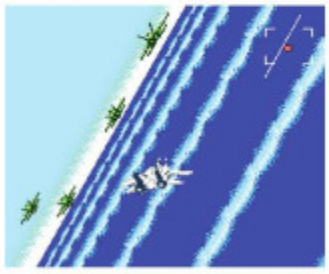
IN 1992 CALTRON (another Taiwan-based studio) released a cartridge called Caltron 6 in 1, found elsewhere in this book, which contained six original games. Although these six games were only ever available in North America as part of that compilation, a Madrid publisher called Gluk Video released them in Spain as individual titles. Adam & Eve is a take on Balloon Fight and is based on that classic scene in the Bible in which Adam ties a balloon to his head and has to float around, popping the balloons of floating snakes. It was somewhere in Genesis, look it up. To its credit, it does add one feature not in Balloon Fight: you can occasionally pick up pumps to re-inflate your balloon if you take a hit. ■

FACT

Gluk was a brand owned by Photopak SA, a Spanish company who used the Gluk name to sell unlicensed NES games and clone consoles.

AFTER BURNER

Year 1989
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen



DESPITE THE NINTENDO vs Sega rivalry that built throughout the 8-bit generation and exploded when the 16-bit era arrived, you may be surprised at the number of Sega arcade game ports released on the NES courtesy of unlicensed game specialist Tengen. One of these was After Burner, a reasonable adaptation of the much-loved combat flight simulator found in practically every arcade throughout the late '80s during the Top Gun craze (which this was clearly designed to capitalise on). Flying an F-14 'Thunder Cat', you take off from the Tengen Enterprise aircraft carrier (originally the Sega Enterprise) and fly through 22 waves of enemies, taking them out with your vulcan cannon and guided missiles while banking to the side to avoid the projectiles they fire at you. ■

FACT

After Burner II was released on the Famicom in Japan. It's essentially the first version with a new colour palette, different music and less screen flicker.

ALIEN SYNDROME

Year 1988
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

ANOTHER SEGA ARCADE game ported to the NES by Tengen, Alien Syndrome is a top-down shooter inspired to a degree by the *Alien* movies. Set in the year 2089 you play as one of two soldiers – Ricky or Mary – and have to explore six different spaceships which have been infested by aliens. Each ship has a self-destruct sequence initiated but there's a number of stranded humans still on board: you have to locate and save them all, then make your way to the exit and take on one of the games' gruesome boss aliens before flying off as the ship explodes behind you. After blowing up all six ships you reach the final boss, King Core. Destroy that and get your Medal of Honor. ■

FACT

A sequel to Alien Syndrome was released on the Wii and PSP in 2007. While the Wii version's aiming controls were effective, the critical response was underwhelming.

AUTO UPTURN

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

AT FIRST GLANCE Auto Upturn looks like one of those annoying sliding puzzle games, but it's actually more straightforward. Each of its seven stages has you playing as a different character: the aim is to pick up panels and swap them with others to create a picture, while avoiding the enemies also roaming the stage. At first this is all innocent enough: you're a cat trying to make a picture of two cats on a roof, or a sailor trying to put together a picture of a boat. The last two stages suddenly take a turn, however: Stage 6 involves a picture of a woman with her breasts out (you play as a vampire here, for some reason), while Stage 7 is just pure nudity. ■

FACT

The other stages involve Santa making a picture of New York, a Panda making a picture of the Great Wall of China and a Chinese character making a picture of a dragon.

BABY BOOMER

Year 1989
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams

SMALL AMERICAN STUDIO Color Dreams was one of the first to break Nintendo's lock-out chip and make unlicensed games for the NES. Its first was Baby Boomer, a Zapper game about a baby who crawls out of his crib and wanders into the woods. Armed with your gun (or the NES controller if you'd rather move a cursor with the D-Pad), you have to shoot hazards in Baby Boomer's way as he crawls through nine stages in search of his mother. At the end of the game he lands in a pram but when his 'mother' says 'come along baby Hubert,' Boomer realises he's found the wrong mum. The last screen promises that Baby Boomer 2 will reveal what happens next, but the game was never made. ■

FACT

Baby Boomer has a two-player co-op mode: one player can use the Zapper while the other uses the controller to move the cursor.

BALLOON MONSTER

Year 1991
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer Mega Soft

ANOTHER GAME FROM the Caltron 6 in 1 collection that got its own individual release in Spain courtesy of Gluk Video, Balloon Monster – or El Monstruo de los Globos, as it's known there – is essentially an imitation of Pang, also known as Buster Bros. You play as a young lad armed with a harpoon gun, and you have to shoot the huge bubbles bouncing above you. Each time you shoot a bubble it splits into smaller bubbles, and keeps doing so with each shot until it eventually bursts. The aim is to keep shooting them until they're all gone, all while avoiding contact. There are 50 stages in total, although it skips levels 34 and 42 for some reason. ■

FACT

The badly translated Caltron 6 in 1 manual explains that the main idea of Balloon Monster is 'to emphasise the theory of to exchange time with space'. So that's nice.

BEE 52

Year 1992
Publisher Camerica
Developer Codemasters

ESTABLISHED AND WELL-RESPECTED UK developer Codemasters didn't fancy playing to Nintendo's rules so it teamed up with American publisher Camerica to make its own unlicensed NES games. Camerica got the rights to publish all of Codemasters' NES games in North America and this included Bee 52, a side-scrolling action game starring a bee who has to collect nectar in order to keep Really Nice Honey – the company he works for – in business. Players can fly around as Bee 52 and are armed with two attacks: a spit attack that fires projectiles at enemies in front of you, and a sting attack that hurts enemies underneath you. Codemasters' talents mean that Bee 52 is one of the most accomplished unlicensed NES games. ■

FACT

In case you hadn't figured it out, the name Bee 52 is a play on words referring to B-52 bombers. Which would make more sense if you could actually drop bombs in the game.

BIBLE BUFFET

Year 1993
Publisher Wisdom Tree
Developer Wisdom Tree

AS WELL AS releasing games under its main name, Color Dreams also formed a second brand called Wisdom Tree, which it used for publishing religious games based on Christianity (something considered a strict no-no when it came to Nintendo of America's licensing). One such game was Bible Buffet, a food-themed video board game for up to four players. Landing on an 'action square' took you to a mini-game where you collect food while using utensils and exploding oil drums to defend yourself from sentient walking snacks (which I think was in *Ezekiel* 24:10). Landing on a Pop Quiz square gives you a true-or-false question about the Bible, which you have to look up in the 92-page, 950-question booklet that comes with the game. ■

FACT

Sample question: 'The blind men in *Matthew* 9:27–31 were healed because of good nutrition: true or false?' (False: Jesus did it.)

BIBLE ADVENTURES

Year 1990
Publisher Wisdom Tree
Developer Wisdom Tree

THE FIRST GAME Color Dreams released under the Wisdom Tree name is also the most well-known. Bible Adventures is a compilation of three games, each featuring the same central mechanic: the ability to lift things over your head and throw them, like you can in Super Mario Bros. 2. The first game, Noah's Ark, puts you in the role of Noah as you try to populate the ark with animals before the flood comes. Noah has presumably been working at the gym because he can not only carry animals like cows and horses over his head, he can even stack four or five on top of each other. You can restore your health by reading Bible verses, even though the Bible didn't exist then since Noah was currently living it. The second game is Baby Moses, which has you playing as Moses' sister Miriam. The Pharaoh of Egypt has ordered his soldiers to kill every male Hebrew child by throwing them into the River Nile, so Miriam has to carry Moses to the end of the river, avoiding enemies, so she can safely put him in a little ark. Finally, David and Goliath puts you in the role of the diminutive David. This one's split into two sections: the first tasks you with gathering your flock of sheep while defending them from lions, bears, squirrels, scorpions and goats (it seems every animal in the forest hates David and his sheep), while the second has you taking on Goliath in a fight to the death. ■

FACT

Bible Adventures reportedly sold around 350,000 copies, the vast majority of which were sold in Christian bookstores.

BIG NOSE THE CAVEMAN

Year 1991
Publisher Camerica
Developer Optimus Software

THIS PLATFORMER, ORIGINALLY published on home computers in Europe by Codemasters, stars a prehistoric protagonist with a rather sizeable schnozz (certainly bigger than the relatively normal one featured on the game's cover art, at least). Big Nose's village is starving and Thanksgiving's only a few days away, even though the events that led to Thanksgiving wouldn't occur for another 20,000 years or so. While out looking for a mythical peanut butter mine, Big Nose spots a huge pterodactyl and decides to follow it, in the hope of catching it to feed his fellow villagers. There are four worlds in this game, each consisting of six or seven smaller stages. And yes, don't worry: at the end Big Nose does cook the pterodactyl for his villagers. ■

FACT

Unused graphics stored in the cartridge include a logo saying 'Galoob presents'. It seems that at one point Galoob, the publisher of the Game Genie, was going to release Big Nose.

BIG NOSE FREAKS OUT

Year 1992
Publisher Camerica
Developer Optimus Software

THE SEQUEL TO Big Nose the Caveman has our hero getting into some financial difficulty. On a visit to his local 'Savings and Bones' bank to drop of a huge deposit of bones, Big Nose is assaulted by Leroy the Lizardman, who steals the lot. Determined to get his savings back, Big Nose invents a new skateboard-type contraption and heads out in search of Leroy. As before, there are four worlds here, each with a number of smaller stages. When you reach the end of each world you'll encounter a large dinosaur boss, with said dino also accompanied by Leroy himself. Eventually you face off against Leroy at Murder Mountain(!) and the game ends with you getting your bones back and taking them to the bank. ■

FACT

A Canadian gamer paid $5 at a garage sale for a prototype cartridge that had Big Nose II written on it. It was actually a game with the name Big Nose and the Witch Doctor, but was in a very early state and seemed to be based on Big Nose Freaks Out.

BINGO 75

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

THE LAWLESSNESS OF the NES unlicensed games scene meant that sometimes you'd think you were buying one thing only to discover that the title actually had nothing to do with the actual game. This is the case with Sachen's Bingo 75 (or 75 Bingo as the title screen instead says). While the name may suggest it's a bingo game (or maybe even the 75th bingo game in a painfully long-running series), it is in fact a straightforward slot machine game with an endless supply of money. After spinning there's a 'double up' option, which involves a basic 'higher or lower' playing card game. Win this game to see a picture of a woman: every time you win she's missing another layer of clothing. That's right, it's an adult game! ■

FACT

The slot machine itself is an extremely basic, three-row affair with typical symbols including bells, cherries, watermelons, 7's and BARs.

BLACKJACK

Year 1992
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Odyssey Software

AMERICAN VIDEO ENTERTAINMENT was a publisher based in San Jose, California. Although it developed a couple of games (Dudes With Attitude and Trolls on Treasure Island), it also released another 16 games created by other developers. One such offering was Blackjack, which does what it says on the box: lets you play Blackjack against either another player or the CPU. In its defence, it does its very best to make such a basic premise as interesting as possible: you can change the design on the back of the cards and choose a colour scheme to play with, while the manual tries its hardest to excite you, making the bold claim: 'This game is so enchanting you'll wish there were more than 24 hours in a day.' ■

FACT

Odyssey Software was also working on a pool game called Cue Stick, which AVE was supposed to release in 1992 as well. The game was ultimately cancelled.

BLOCK FORCE

Year 1990
Publisher RCM
Developer Hwang Shinwei

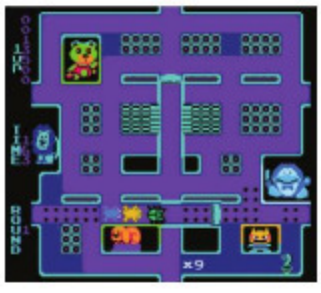
RCM, ANOTHER TAIWANESE publisher, specialised in smaller games that tended to appear on the countless multi-game carts found in various regions. Some of these games did make it to standalone carts, albeit in very limited numbers: Block Force, by independent developer Hwang Shinwei, is an example of this. It's an imitation of an arcade game called Block Hole, in which you control an odd green ship shaped almost like a Tetris block. Various shapes fall from the top of the screen and you have to shoot blocks at them to fill any gaps they may have. If you can fill all the gaps and form a full rectangle of blocks, that shape will disappear. The result is a mix between Tetris and a vertical shoot 'em up. ■

FACT

Hwang Shinwei was a developer who specialised in making small NES games. None of his creations were ever larger than 64KB, which explains why they regularly ended up in multicarts.

BOOKYMAN

Year 1991
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer Mega Soft



CONTINUING ITS MISSION to release each Caltron 6 in 1 game as a standalone title in Spain, Gluk Video gave Bookyman the single cartridge treatment too. Hwang Shinwei had made a game called Brush Roller, which was a clone of arcade title Crush Roller. Bookyman is essentially a modified version of Brush Roller with tweaked graphics. You play as Bookyman himself, a beetle who's trying to clean up the streets while avoiding a pair of lizards and another bug who are trying to chase you. Oddly, 'cleaning up' the street involves painting over all the roads: if you can paint the entire stage without being caught it's onto the next stage (there are eight in total). Occasionally enemies leave footprints in the paint, which must also be cleaned. ■

FACT

The instructions for Bookyman in the Caltron 6 in 1 manual are unfortunately translated: they say that Bookyman has to avoid 'two lizards and a bugger'.

BUBBLE BATH BABES

Year 1991
Publisher Panesian
Developer C&E

ONE OF THE odder holy grails for some NES collectors is finding and owning all three Panesian games. Panesian was a Taiwanese publisher that released a trio of titles for the NES in North America that all had one thing in common: they were adult games featuring (very basic) female nudity. Bubble Bath Babes is a sort of cross between Tetris and Puzzle Bobble (even though the latter didn't exist at the time), in which you move shapes consisting of coloured bubbles as they float upwards, in order to match them with others. Completing stages will show you a pixel art illustration of a woman, who says flirty lines ('now you get to soak in my suds') and wears progressively less clothing as you proceed. ■

FACT

Bubble Bath Babes was originally known as Magic Bubble in China. A nicer name, perhaps, but packed with exactly the same smut.

CALTRON 6 IN 1

Year 1992
Publisher Caltron
Developer Mega Soft

ONE OF THE more notable multi-cart games, mainly because most of the games included were unique to this 6 in 1 cart in North America (as already noted, Gluk Video released them as standalone carts in Spain). Caltron 6 in 1 consists of the following sextet of adventures: Cosmos Cop, Magic Carpet 1001, Balloon Monster, Adam & Eve, Porter and Bookyman. There are numerous versions: when Caltron went out of business its remaining carts were bought by Texas company Myriad Games, which gave them a new label. It's claimed that fewer than 100 carts exist, making it extremely rare among collectors. Meanwhile, HES sold it in Australia as the Real Player's Pack, while in Brazil it was released by Dynacom as Multi Acao 6 in 1. ■

FACT

The Myriad Games version says '$250 value' on the box, along with 'only $69: that's only $11.50 a game'. It's a hard sell considering the six games were fairly low quality.

CAPTAIN COMIC: THE ADVENTURE

Year 1989
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams

CAPTAIN COMIC WAS originally an MS-DOS PC game before its developer Michael Denio teamed up with Color Dreams to bring it to the NES. The planet of Osmic has lost its legendary treasures – the Crown of the Ages, the Mystical Gems of Lascorbanos and the Thousand Coins of Tenure – so the elders call on 'galactic hero, righter of wrongs and all around nice guy' Captain Comic to save the day. The game is a side-scrolling platform adventure, where you can freely roam various environments in search of the three stolen artefacts. The soundtrack is comprised entirely of basic renditions of classical music, including the Blue Danube (which is fitting given the game's space theme, since it was also used in *2001: A Space Odyssey*). ■

FACT

Michael Denio started work with Color Dreams on another game, but the plans were abandoned when he decided to make Captain Comic 2 for PC instead.

CASTLE OF DECEIT

Year 1990
Publisher Bunch Games
Developer Bunch Games

THE CASTLE OF Deceit lies at the top of Mount Althus, and serves as the gateway to six other universes. It also hosts six magical stones called the Runes of Guarding, which ironically have to be guarded. Phylax, the mystic tasked with guarding the runes, goes slowly mad after centuries and hallucinates six deadly creatures, which are then brought to life by the runes. The creatures steal the runes and head off to the other universes: enter Eebo, a magician's apprentice who has to get them back. Each of the game's stages consists mainly of action platformer gameplay until you find the boss, at which point the viewpoint switches to third-person and you have to shoot your foe until they die, giving up their rune. ■

FACT

The ending is a short message: 'The flow of spacetime twists and then smooths, resuming its proper shape. With the runes doing their job, yours is at an end. Well done! Well played! Congratulations.'

CHALLENGE OF THE DRAGON

Year 1990
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams

READY FOR CONFUSION? There were actually two unlicensed NES games called Challenge of the Dragon, and they were completely different. The first, published by Color Dreams, tells the story of Demiwind, a young chap born in the land of Lorin. As a young boy, Demiwind used his magic powers for frivolity, making eggs float and turning chickens into grasshoppers. But when 'disaster and puberty struck' (according to the manual), he turned into 'a walking testosterone magic machine' and kidnapped Lady Ninita, the girlfriend of dragon style kung fu master Sir Burkelot. Time to kick some Demiwind rump over 10 stages: although they're your typical side-scrolling, single-plane platform environments, combat is more like a Double Dragon style beat 'em up where multiple hits are needed to defeat foes. ■

FACT

It's believed that Lady Ninita was named after Nina Stanley, Color Dreams' artist. She eventually worked for the likes of Capcom, EA and 3DO, where she designed the signature look for the Army Men series.

CHALLENGE OF THE DRAGON

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

THE OTHER CHALLENGE of the Dragon was instead released by Sachen under a number of different guises, including Chinese Kung Fu (although the title screen always said Challenge of the Dragon regardless of which version you played). You play as Master Lee – certainly nothing to do with Bruce, don't worry lawyers – who's just finished training to become a kung fu master. Before he can leave the Sou Lin temple, he has to pass five tests and collect the sacred boxes to prove his worth. There are two play styles here: the main one is a Double Dragon style beat 'em up (though unlike the other Challenge of the Dragon, this one lets you move in all directions), while there are also occasional platforming stages to mix things up. ■

FACT

Sachen's version was published in Brazil by Milmar. Milmar was also responsible for the Top System, a grey market NES 'clone' that could play both NES and Famicom cartridges.

CHEETAHMEN II

Year 1993
Publisher Active Enterprises
Developer Active Enterprises

OF ALL THE games in Active Enterprises' Action 52 compilation, it was the final game – Cheetahmen – that Active seemingly had the most interest in. That's why, shortly before the company closed down, it attempted to release a sequel. Although Active ran out of money before it could release Cheetahmen II, 1,500 manufactured copies were left sitting in the manufacturer's warehouse. It wasn't until 1997 that the stock was sold on the cheap to collectors, although nowadays a copy can set you back over $1,200.

The game follows the adventures of the Cheetahmen, who now have names – Aries, Apollo and Hercules – as they take on the evil Dr Morbis. Morbis created the Cheetahmen, you see, but he considers them a failed experiment. To remedy this, he's created 'the Ape Man', his strongest 'sub-human' yet, and ordered it to destroy the Cheetahmen.

Cue some clunky and practically broken side-scrolling combat, with the player controlling each Cheetahman

FACT

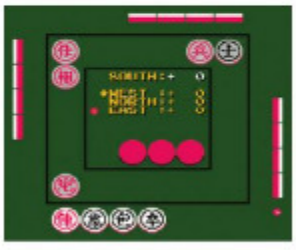
The complete version of Action 52 came with a Cheetahmen comic book, which also promised a line of action figures. Unsurprisingly, these weren't made.

for two stages. At least, that's the plan: a glitch triggers a Game Over screen at the end of the fourth level, meaning the two Aries levels can't be reached without hacking the game.

In order to keep costs down, Active used the plastic shells of around 1,500 unsold Action 52 cartridges as new Cheetahmen II cartridges, though the process wasn't exactly seamless. Because the cartridges already have Action 52 labels on them, a small gold sticker with the wrongly spelled 'CHEETAMEN II' was placed on the back of each cart to make it 'clear' what game it actually was. ■

CHESS ACADEMY

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen



YOU'D BE FORGIVEN for initially thinking that Chess Academy was about that centuries-old game with the king, queen, pawns and bishops. Then you remember that Sachen is a Taiwanese studio and you quickly realise that it's actually about Chinese Chess, that millennia-old game with the general, elephant, chariot and horse.

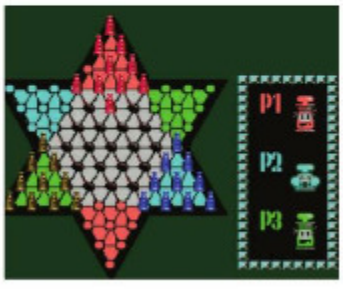
Actually, it's not quite as straightforward as that: although Chess Academy does use pieces from Chinese Chess, the actual game uses rules more similar to those in Mahjong (which involves completing sets of tiles, sort of like Poker). Naturally, this being a Satchen game, there's an adult element to it: just to make sure you're paying attention, the game will occasionally reward you with nudity if you play particularly well. ■

FACT

Chinese Chess, also known as Xiangqi, actually predates western chess. While the chess we know is believed to have originated in India around the sixth century, Xiangqi dates back to the Warring States period of ancient China (475–221 BC).

CHINESE CHECKERS

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen



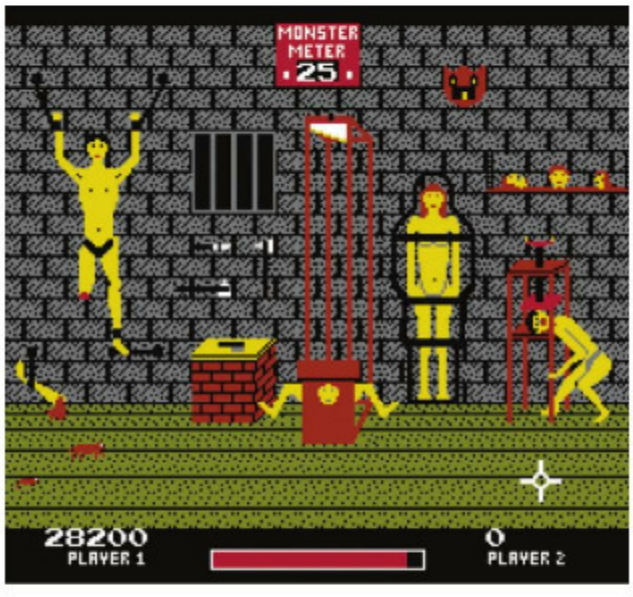
JUST TO CONFUSE things even further, Sachen also released a game based on Chinese Checkers, which isn't the same thing as Chinese Chess (and isn't even Chinese: it was invented in Germany). You may be more familiar with this one: set on a star-shaped board, each player has ten coloured pegs sitting in one of the corners. The aim is to move all ten pegs over to the opposite corner before your opponent. You can move pegs in two ways: either by moving them one space at a time, or by hopping them over adjacent pegs (be that your own or an opponent's). This NES version is based on the three-player variation, with the CPU filling in for non-human players. ■

FACT

Chinese Checkers first appeared in Germany as Stern-Halma in 1892. It wasn't referred to as Chinese Checkers until it came to America 36 years later, as a marketing term for what was called Hop Ching Checkers.

CHILLER

Year 1990
Publisher American Game Cartridges
Developer Exidy



ONE OF THE main reasons Nintendo enacted strict licensing for NES games was so it could control the content on its system. As a company keen to ensure its system only featured tasteful games relatively free of controversy (the odd Friday the 13th or A Nightmare on Elm Street game aside), Nintendo's licensing policy meant it could prevent the release of games with religious content, gratuitous sex and nudity, and graphic violence. Of course, as this section of the book has already shown, once the NES's lock-out procedure was broken these restrictions went out the window. If you've been reading this book sequentially you've already seen examples of unlicensed games with religious and sexual content: now it's time for the violence.

Chiller was an extremely controversial arcade light gun game, which was ported to the NES by Arizona publisher American Game Cartridges. It's essentially a torture game but it pretends to be noble by including a silly plot in its manual about an evil force which has invaded a castle and brought the dead back to life. In reality, this is just an excuse to make your way through five stages, blowing gory chunks out of everything you see. The most questionable of these stages is definitely the third, set in a basement in which naked people are tied to torture racks while a river of blood runs in the background. Oh, and there's a crocodile in the river, who takes a bite out of a victim hanging above it. ■

FACT

Despite the lack of restrictions, the NES version of Chiller was victim to a little self-censorship. The arcade version was much gorier and had no 'you're a good guy, honest' plot.

COSMIC SPACEHEAD

Year 1991
Publisher Camerica / Codemasters
Developer Codemasters

KNOWN IN NORTH America as Linus Spacehead's Cosmic Crusade but with a less convoluted name in its native United Kingdom, Cosmic Spacehead is an adventure game by Codemasters that's part point-and-click, part platformer. It's actually a sequel to Linus Spacehead, which was part of the four-game Quattro Adventure compilation (see later in this book). In that game, an alien called Linus crash-landed on Earth and had to get back to his native planet Linoleum.

In this follow-up, Linus's fellow Linoleans don't believe his story about Earth, so he plans to travel back there – this time as a tourist – to take photos and prove that the world he described to them was genuine. Before that, though, he has to actually get there: the game begins with Linus still on Linoleum with no money, no spacecar, no camera and no respect from his fellow citizens.

The 'adventure' areas are basic point-and-click sections where you're given Look, Pick Up, Talk, Give and Use commands. These areas are connected by 'arcade' sections, which are more like a standard platform game. Once you've beaten these sections once, you can skip them when travelling between locations again.

In case you're wondering, don't worry: Linus does eventually make it to Earth. You don't get to explore it, though: the game ends with him reaching the planet. You do get a lovely cut-scene of him taking photos in New York though, as well as a picture of him getting a hero's welcome when he returns home. ■

FACT

The PAL version of Cosmic Spacehead differs slightly from the alternatively-named North American one. Linus can change direction mid-jump, and there's also a two-player mini-game called Pie Slap.

COSMOS COP

Year 1991
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer Mega Soft

COSMOS COP IS another of the games in Caltron's 6 in 1 cartridge which got a standalone release in Spain. It's set in 2010, where the galaxy has been attacked by invaders from Beta Star in the 'Alienation Space'. After all the galaxy's forces are destroyed, the Universe Defence Headquarters sends out their final hope: Cosmos Cop, a single mech in a jetpack. No pressure. Playing as Cosmos Cop, you have to run and fly through six stages until you reach 'the Chief', a surprisingly easy final boss. Cosmos Cop clearly takes more than a little inspiration from Space Harrier, though it isn't quite as impressive as Sega's arcade shooter because the NES's limitations mean there are a lot of flickering sprites. ■

FACT

Destroy the final boss for a single screen with three vague credits: 'Program by Patrick, Graphics by Pandy, Music by Martino'.

CREATOM

Year 1991
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer Mega Soft

THIS BIZARRE 'GAME within a game' is convoluted so bear with me. Frustrated that Earth's inhabitants aren't thinking for themselves anymore, educators and scientists created a new 3D game called Creatom, which 'develops powers of logical thinking and inventiveness'. It's based on a concept called I-development, which is aimed at 'dramatic increases in the flexibilty and self-control of your mental powers', as opposed to IQ which 'does not measure a level of intelligence that can be increased'. What this all boils down to is a strange and confusing game about coloured cubes which is split into two parts: the first has you rotating a cube to figure out an unknown pattern, while the second has you rearranging falling cubes to recreate a pattern you were given to memorise at the start. ■

FACT

'Never shall we solve the many mysteries of the universe,' says the intro. 'Neither can we learn in one life all there is to be gained from the many levels and intricate details of Creatom'. You said it.

CRIME BUSTERS

Year 1989
Publisher Dismac / Gradiente
Developer Bit Corporation

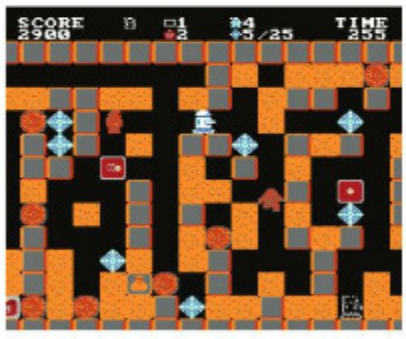
ALTHOUGH RELATIVELY UNHEARD of in most other parts of the world, Crime Busters was pretty well-known among gamers in Brazil because manufacturer Gradiente bundled it with its NES clone (the Phantom), while another company called Dismac repackaged it for its own clone (the Bit System). It's a Zapper light gun game, and it's actually one of the better ones on the NES. Playing as a police officer, you have to visit three different environments – outside a bank, inside the bank and inside a warehouse populated by ninjas for some reason – and gun down a certain number of enemies before you're hit. There are some entertaining set-pieces – some enemies appear near windows, which smash as you kill them – and while it's short it's fun. ■

FACT

The Phantom was an interesting system. The console looked like an Atari 7800, the insides played like an NES, the controller was like a Mega Drive's and the light gun looked like the Master System's Light Phaser.

CRYSTAL MINES

Year 1989
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams



IT'S THE YEAR 2265 and a new planet has been discovered. You decide to spend all your life savings on a mining operation on this new planet, in the hope that you can find crystals beneath the surface that'll earn you your money back and an awful lot more. It's dangerous business, though, which is why you're instead remotely controlling your robot, CM-205, as it digs through the dirt and defeats the hostile aliens that try to destroy it. At its core (ahem), Crystal Mines plays like a clone of Boulderdash, but there's a little more to it in that CM-205 is also armed with a gun. This makes it a little easier but arguably a tad more fun to play as a result. ■

FACT

If you don't fancy playing through all 100 levels of Crystal Mines, you can press A and B together on the title screen to reveal a menu that lets you choose which stage to start on.

DANCING BLOCK

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

THIS STRANGE PAC-MAN style game does have one interesting mechanic, and given that it was published by Sachen it's even more interesting that said mechanic doesn't involve a badly drawn woman taking her clothes off for once. The aim in Dancing Block (or Dancing Blocks, according to the packaging) is to roll your block around each maze, collecting all the fruit without being hit by any enemies. The twist is that your block can shoot, but only sometimes. You see, the gun is only on two faces of the block, and you can only shoot when either of those faces is pointing to the side. This adds an element of strategy to proceedings, as you have to roll around in a way that keeps your gun available. ■

FACT

The game randomly throws 'devil stages' at you, where weird green slugs with scary faces chase you at high speeds.

DEATH RACE

Year 1990
Publisher American Game Cartridges
Developer American Game Cartridges

AFTER TRYING TO push the boundaries of taste with Chiller, American Game Cartridges tried its hand again with Death Race, a top-down racing game where the primary aim is to collect flags and reach the exit before time runs out, but the secondary aim is to blow up and run over as many enemies as possible. Although the name suggests it's inspired by the movie *Death Race 2000* – where killing pedestrians nets the drivers more points – this NES takes a similar step back to the one Chiller took by making it clear that you're running over 'pesky gremlins', not humans. You can upgrade your car as you proceed and two players can play simultaneously, either as a team or head-to-head. ■

FACT

Death Race is based on the 1976 arcade game of the same name: that version was a little trickier because running over enemies turned them into gravestones which got in the way as you drove around.

DEATHBOTS

Year 1990
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Odyssey Software

IN THE FUTURE, Alcatraz Island has been turned into the Gamma Base for the questionable Mutech Corporation. The base is controlled by an AI, which one day evolves to the point that it becomes sentient. It orders all countries to destroy their nuclear weapons, and demands they produce the technology to increase the AI's own intelligence and processing power. Any countries that refuse will be destroyed by a gamma bomb. While the US, Israel and India prepare to give up, one man dons a secret battlesuit and plans to destroy the gamma bomb. The problem is it's hundreds of feet underground, surrounded by the powerful Deathbots (which are basically Terminators), meaning six stages of top-down running and gunning as you fight your way to the bomb. ■

FACT

If you press A, B and Start on the second controller when you're on the title screen, then repeat this on the first controller, your number of lives goes from 5 to 60.

DESTROYER

Year 1992
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer Megasoft

USUALLY FEATURING ON low-quality multicarts with the likes of 50 in 1 or 100 in 1 on the label, Destroyer did get a standalone release in Brazil as El Destructor. It's set in the year 3001, after the Earth has been destroyed by terrorists from outer space. The human race moves to Mars, but it looks like the terrorists are coming again so a spaceship called the Destroyer is sent out to defeat the enemy before they reach our new home turf. Much of Destroyer takes place in an asteroid field, but the game's actually severely broken: if you die, it seemingly fails to register this and the screen continues to scroll up anyway, until you reach a boss battle that never ends since there's no hero to kill it. ■

FACT

This isn't to be confused with Sky Destroyer, the Taito shooter that was released on the Famicom and was later bootlegged onto NES carts in Brazil and Hong Kong.

DIZZY THE ADVENTURER

Year 1993
Publisher Camerica
Developer Codemasters

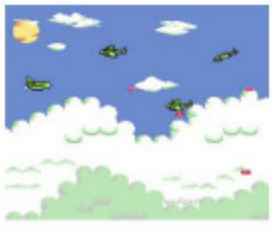
THE SIXTH TITLE in the series of Dizzy adventure games, which were huge on home computers in Europe. Starting off in prison after being captured by a troll, Dizzy has to break out, find his girlfriend Daisy and collect 50 stars to wake her from an endless sleep. Like other Dizzy games, the central mechanic involves gathering items (you can only hold three at a time) and using them on various objects and characters to solve puzzles and proceed through the game. Dizzy the Adventurer was bundled with the Aladdin Deck Enhancer, a cartridge system that plugged into the NES and took smaller, cheaper carts to bypass its region locks. Because it was included with the Aladdin, it's the only NES game to never get a full-size cartridge. ■

FACT

A total of seven games were released for the Aladdin Deck Enhancer: all the others were also available as standalone full-sized NES cartridges.

DOUBLE STRIKE

Year 1989
Publisher AVE / Sachen
Developer Joy Van



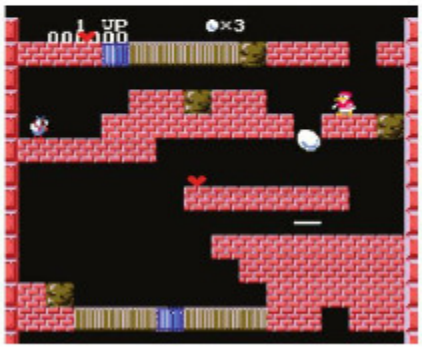
THIS STRAIGHTFORWARD SIDE-SCROLLING shoot 'em up was also named Twin Eagle in some countries (not to be confused with the other Twin Eagle, the vertical shooter released officially by Romstar). Playing either solo or with a friend, you have to fly your experimental Thrasher Hawk-7 plane into the South Pacific, where over the past five years some of the most beautiful islands in the world have been invaded by a seemingly illiterate terrorist organisation called DAMED (Destructive Armed Militant Enemy Devotee). The game's set over nine stages – comprising three sky, jungle and ocean levels – before you finally reach the terrorist base, complete with a huge swastika on the wall. Destroy that for the incredible final message: 'No pains no gains'. ■

FACT

As if making unlicensed games for the NES wasn't cheeky enough, American Video Entertainment also put its own 'seal of quality' inside its game manuals.

DUCK

Year 1990
Publisher HES / Dismac
Developer Bit Corporation



THOSE WHO OWNED a Sega Master System may remember Penguin Land, a quirky egg-pushing platformer. Duck is a fairly blatant imitation of that game, the obvious switching of species aside. You have to push your egg from the top of each level all the way to the bottom, digging holes Lode Runner style along the way. Of course, it being an egg, it isn't the easiest of items to accompany. If it drops too far it'll break open, and even landing on top of it yourself will shatter it. If you can make it through all 20 stages the game loops, so sadly we'll never get to see the egg hatching (if indeed that's the aim: it may be an evil cannibal duck for all we know). ■

FACT

Duck was distributed in Brazil by Dismac, and published in Australia by HES under the name Duck Maze.

DUDES WITH ATTITUDE

Year 1990
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Michael Crick

WHEN A CHILD is given a game called Dudes with Attitude they'd be forgiven for expecting something that's perhaps radical, bodacious and perhaps tubular in equal measure. The resulting game is about as far away from gnarly as you can get (unless it's the other definition of 'gnarly', meaning all rough and twisted). After choosing one of six faces – Happy, Dude, Foxy, Babe, Patch or Bozo – you're given 32 different stages full of blocks you have to remove. Your 'dude' is constantly moving left to right, so all you do is move them up and down to hit the blocks, collecting paint to turn them different colours (you can only break blocks the same colour as you). A little underwhelming. ■

FACT

Based on the cover and manual artwork, it's likely that Dudes with Attitude was based on Madballs, a series of rubber ball characters made by American Greetings in the mid '80s.

EXODUS: JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LAND

Year 1991
Publisher Wisdom Tree
Developer Wisdom Tree

ANOTHER CHRISTIAN GAME released under Color Dreams' Wisdom Tree label, Exodus has you playing as Moses – the adult one this time, not the baby one in Bible Adventures – as he tries to lead the Israelites to the promised land. What this essentially boils down to is a Boulder Dash clone, using the same engine as Color Dreams' non-religious game Crystal Mines. In each of the game's 100 levels, you have to collect five question marks while firing letter 'W's at enemy magicians, taskmasters and soldiers (the 'W' represents the word of God). After each stage you'll get five Bible trivia questions: get ten right over time and you'll get an extra life. Or be born again, if you will. ■

FACT

Exodus has a cheat code which lets you skip five stages at a time. Which isn't very Christian-like, when you think about it.

F-15 CITY WAR

Year 1990
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Idea-Tek

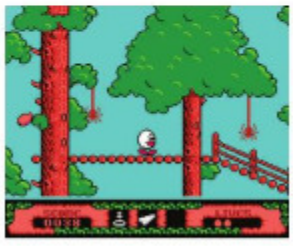
YOUR NONDESCRIPT CITY is under siege by a whole host of different forces. Attack helicopters, fighter jets, huge gunboats, armoured tanks and even giant robots are making their way through the streets, destroying everything in sight. It's up to you, in your trusty F-15 Eagle, to save the day by blowing up the enemy. After all, according to the game box, 'it's no longer just an issue of patriotism, it's life or death'. The action takes place from a third-person perspective as you zoom through the city streets, in a manner similar to Sega's classic arcade chopper game Thunder Blade. Beat the huge bomber at the end of level 5 and you'll be awarded with a medal and the message: 'You are the hero of the city way'. ■

FACT

Certain areas of the game are played from a top-down viewpoint, further making it clear that Thunder Blade was the inspiration.

THE FANTASTIC ADVENTURES OF DIZZY

Year 1993
Publisher Camerica / Codemasters
Developer Codemasters



THE SEVENTH GAME in the Dizzy series (simply known as Fantastic Dizzy in Europe on other systems) sees Dizzy's girlfriend Daisy kidnapped by the nasty wizard Evil Zaks, who takes her away to his castle in the clouds. Starting off in his treehouse, Dizzy has to make his way to Zaks' castle and rescue Daisy. The standard Dizzy concept isn't changed here: although the game is technically a platformer, Dizzy can't actually harm any enemies he touches. Instead, the player uses in inventory system – like that in a point-and-click adventure – to collect and use items where necessary. Every member of the Yolkfolk (the characters that make up the Dizzy series) appears in this game, from Dizzy's best friend Denzil to his sister Dora. ■

FACT

Other Yolkfolk include Dizzy's grandfather Grand Dizzy, the sleepy Dozy and the hippy Dylan (possibly named after the hippy rabbit from *The Magic Roundabout*).

FANTASY ZONE

Year 1989
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

ANOTHER SEGA ARCADE game ported to the NES by Tengen, Fantasy Zone is possibly the most sickeningly adorable shoot 'em up you'll ever play. You play as Opa-Opa, a tiny little sentient red and white spaceship, and you have to save the Fantasy Zone from the evil Menons, alien forces who've stolen money to build a fearsome fleet. By killing all the Menons and reclaiming their money, you can buy upgrades to help Opa-Opa more easily defeat his enemies. Fantasy Zone has a cult following for its incredibly catchy music, its impressive bosses (which almost fill the entire screen at times) and above all else its contagious charm. When Opa-Opa flies towards the ground, for example, his little feet come out so he can run across the surface. ■

FACT

The sequel, Fantasy Zone II: The Tears of Opa-Opa, got a Famicom port but sadly never made it to the west. That'll explain the tears.

FIGHTING HERO

Year 1991
Publisher CCE
Developer Mega Soft

STREET FIGHTER II was one of the most monumental games of the early '90s, so of course it was imitated countless times. While the brunt of this was mostly taken by 16-bit consoles, the NES got one or two as well. Fighting Hero is a key example: playing as Leon (who's clearly inspired by Ryu), you travel the continents fighting other opponents. Asia has a ninja called Masa, Australia has a brawler called Vic, Africa has the boomerang-wielding Billy and Europe has the knee-attack-favouring Alex. Beat all four of them and you'll travel to North America for the final boss, Joe the boxer. It may look like Street Fighter but it sure doesn't play like it: attacks only trigger when you release the button, making things feel sluggish. ■

FACT

There was also a Fighting Hero III – which was only released on the Famicom – but no Fighting Hero II. It's possible this was to make it look like a sequel to Street Fighter II.

FINAL COMBAT

Year 1992
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

IF YOU THINK war is difficult at the best of times spare a thought for Johnson and Berry, two 'good fellows in the battlefield' who've been given a crazy mission: since reinforcements haven't arrived, they have to drive their tank to all 16 enemy bases and destroy them all, then come out in one piece. Well, two pieces: one per soldier. Each base has a central hub surrounded by impenetrable blocks: after a while spent destroying enemy forces, a flashing truck will eventually appear. Destroy that to get a key that exposes the hub, which can then be destroyed to clear that base. Final Combat is an entertaining game, if a little difficult in the later stages when all hell breaks loose. ■

FACT

Sachen made more than 70 games for the NES and Famicom, as well as more than 30 for the Game Boy. This meant it easily released more unlicensed Nintendo games than any other publisher.

FIRE DRAGON

Year Unknown
Publisher Interative
Developer Gamtec Corp

BRAZILIAN PUBLISHER INTERATIVE (no, that's not a spelling mistake) published Fire Dragon, a rather basic game by Gamtec (no, that's not a spelling mistake either). Playing as a dragon, you have to move around a screen trying to eat as many small balls as possible. Every time you collect a ball your dragon's tail grows by a section, meaning the more you eat the longer you get. Eventually this makes movement more tricky because if you run into your tail you'll get Game Over (presumably because you bit yourself). If you're reading this thinking 'that sounds exactly like Snake', that's because it is: this is just Snake with a Dragon. But if I'd just said that, I wouldn't have managed to fill this section. ■

FACT

The Sega Mega Drive got a game called Link Dragon in 1993, which looks almost the same. It's hard to tell which game came out first.

FIREHAWK

Year 1989
Publisher Camerica / Codemasters
Developer Codemasters

THE SMALL REPUBLIC of the Lafian Islands is being run into the ground by drug barons who've all teamed up to turn their operations global. At its wit's end, the Lafian government decides to place a phone call to the good ol' US of A and ask for help. You are that help: as the pilot of 'the most devastating helicopter gunship in existence', you have to fly in and blow to smithereens anything that looks even a tiny bit druggy. Most of Firehawk is played top-down as you fly your chopper around taking out targets. Occasionally, however, you'll be asked to head down to ground level and pick up your reconnaissance paratroopers, at which point the action cuts to an extreme close shot to help aim the ladder. ■

FACT

If you enter your name as DIZZY on the high score table, a brief demo of The Fantastic Adventures of Dizzy will play.

GAIAPOLIS

Year 1994
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

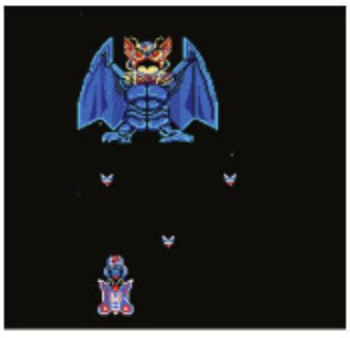
THE ORIGINAL GAIAPOLIS was an arcade game made by Konami and introduced to arcades in 1993. It told the story of a prince called Gerard, a fairy called Elaine and a dragon called Duke who all team up to help stop the evil King Darkness, who plans to bring an ancient demon back to life and terrorise the world. This Sachen-developed port was apparently made without Konami's blessing, and while it does take a few liberties – the characters are now called Ken, Amy and Liv, for starters – it isn't exactly the worst example of the beat 'em up genre. The game culminates in a final boss fight against a giant snake-man: when you beat him you head off in a boat as his base crumbles into the sea. ■

FACT

While most NES games are difficult, the same can't be said about Gaiapolis. This may be because Sachen provides the player with 99 continues.

GALACTIC CRUSADER

Year 1990
Publisher Bunch Games
Developer Sachen



AT FIRST GLANCE Galactic Crusader looks like a standard vertical-scrolling shoot 'em up with waves of enemies and the occasional boss thrown in for good measure. To be fair, that's because this is an entirely accurate description of the game. That said, there's at least one interesting gimmick to be found here: your ship is 'alive', according to the manual. It's 'a metamorphic creature that can transform from a huge flying insect into a metallic destroyer'. While this makes it sound like you get to evolve your ship into some sort of war beast, in practice the opposite is the case: every time you take a hit you 'devolve' into a less impressive-looking creature. It's at least an interesting attempt at trying something unique, however. ■

FACT

The final boss is Dragon King, an enormous screen-filling dragon with an extremely wide and fast laser that can wipe you out with a single shot.

GAUNTLET

Year 1987
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

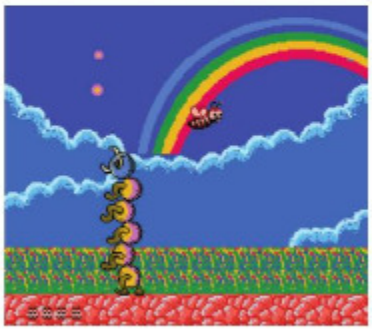
WHEN TENGEN STARTED making NES games it initially wanted to do things by the book. It wasn't entirely happy with Nintendo's licensing terms, however, so it attempted to negotiate with Nintendo to try and make its license less restrictive. Nintendo refused, so Tengen grudgingly went along with the standard deal, while secretly trying to work on a way to break the NES's lock-out chip. During this process Tengen released three official NES games – R.B.I. Baseball, Pac-Man and Gauntlet – before it managed to crack the code. It promptly pulled the licensed versions and re-released unlicensed ones. As such, this version of Gauntlet is identical to the licensed one, except for the newly Nintendo seal-free packaging and the shape of the cartridge. ■

FACT

While other manufacturers got past the NES lock-out using a voltage spike, Tengen decided this was too dangerous and so got a copy of the lock-out code and reverse engineered it.

GO! BENNY!

Year 1992
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer Mega Soft



BENNY THE BEE lives in a beautiful garden, but he's starting to run out of honey. In order to find more he has to leave his home and travel elsewhere to see if he can locate some. The problem is, this involves entering the turf (literally) of other less friendly insects, so Benny has his work cut out for him. It isn't until you start the game that you realise this story, taken from the back of the box, was completely pointless: Go! Benny! is in reality a side-scrolling shoot 'em up in which your 'ship' is a bee and your 'bullets' are stingers. After shooting your way through five stages you face off against a giant parrot, before it's defeated and you're dumped unceremoniously back to the title screen. ■

FACT

The title screen image for Go! Benny! appears to have been 'borrowed' from the German comic book and cartoon *Maya the Bee*.

GLUK THE THUNDER WARRIOR

Year 1992
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer Micro Genius / Gluk Video

MOST OF THE games Gluk Video released in Brazil were unmodified versions of titles developed by studios like NTDEC and Micro Genius. Gluk the Thunder Warrior, however, underwent a little tinkering before release. It's based on Thunder Warrior, an action platformer originally published in Taiwan by Micro Genius and starring a generic Conan-like character. Gluk took the game, replaced its barbarian protagonist with its odd green bug-like mascot (who conveniently is also called Gluk) and sold it as Gluk the Thunder Warrior instead. Hey presto, instant brand awareness. Of course, it didn't help that the game was a bit rubbish but this section should have made it clear by now that this was rarely a prohibiting factor when it came to getting a game on shelves. ■

FACT

Like most other unlicensed game publishers, Gluk Video also made and sold its own clone NES systems. The NASA looked just like the NES, while the YESS looked more like a European SNES.

THE GREAT WALL

Year 1992
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

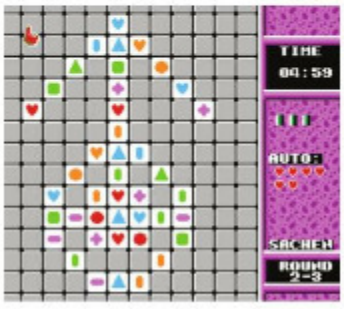
THIS IS A puzzle game where you knock Tetris-style shapes out of the Great Wall of China. That's the boring part: the amazing part is the blurb on the back of the box, so for once I'm going to let Sachen describe this one: 'The Great Wall is tearing down! What a shocked information! No wonder the Emperor Ching got mad! So he is warning to people who wants to buy this cartridge: if you are not afraid to die, come over here! Amigo! Do you want to be a hero? Or to be a chicken?' Bold words. It appears that 'Emperor Ching' may be a mistranslation of Zheng, the emperor who arranged the building of the original Great Wall. ■

FACT

The game's cover shows three men, one of whom is indeed the first emperor Qin Shi Huang, known at one point as Zheng.

HAPPY PAIRS

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen



IT'S SAID THAT sometimes the most basic games can make for the most enjoyable experiences, and while Happy Pairs isn't going to have you screaming with joy and distressing the neighbours, it's still fun enough to pass an hour or so. It's an extremely simplistic looking tile-matching game, similar to Mahjong Solitaire (also known as Shanghai), but the rules are slightly different. To make a match, you have to be able to draw a line between both shapes which has no more than two turns in it. As you work your way through its 54 stages you'll also be travelling around the world, with the game showing a picture of the likes of Japan, China, Spain or England every time you beat three levels. ■

FACT

If you get stuck Happy Pairs has a rudimentary auto-match function. Press B and it'll make the first match it finds (not necessarily the best one).

HELL FIGHTER

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

FOR MANY A year, Satan has been eager to control the world, but he's never had the right opportunity… that is, until a crystal ball falls into his hands. The ball lets Satan unleash chaos on the world, with volcanoes erupting and Hell on Earth essentially kicking off. Luckily, a wise old man who knows how to save the world has bestowed this power onto a young chap who knows Chinese kung fu. Off our hero trots to destroy Satan. Hell Fighter is a side-scrolling action game taking place over six stages, each ending with a fairly standard boss: a skeleton, a snake, a dragon, a crab, a monkey's head and a floating demon head with three faces. Okay, maybe that last one wasn't so conventional. ■

FACT

The game's extremely dramatic ending shows the crystal ball (looking suspiciously like an image from an Altered Beast cut-scene) followed by an arrow shattering it into pieces.

HIDDEN CHINESE CHESS

Year 1989
Publisher Sachen
Developer Joy Van

HIDDEN CHINESE CHESS is a video game version of a real-life variant of Chinese Chess called Banqi (also known as Dark Chess or Blind Chess). It's played on a board half the size of a normal Chinese Chess board, and all 32 tokens are turned face-down so you can't tell which pieces they are. Players take it in turns either turning over tokens to see which piece and colour they are, or moving the pieces of their colour that have already been revealed. Though it can take a little while to get used to, Hidden Chinese Chess is said to be quicker than normal Chinese Chess (otherwise known as Xiangqi), with most games generally lasting 10–20 minutes. ■

FACT

This version has a game-breaking bug: if you play too well the CPU will try to turn over the bottom-right piece. If it's already been turned over or there's nothing there, the game will freeze.

HONEY PEACH

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

SACHEN WASN'T SHY about releasing games that featured female nudity, and in the case of Honey Peach it proved this was still the case even when there was barely any game there to speak of. What you have here is a series of Rock, Paper, Scissors contests against six ladies of varying ethnicities. Every time you win a two-out-of-three round your opponent has to remove an item of clothing. Win all three rounds and she'll end up entirely in the buff. That's literally all there is to Honey Peach, so if the idea of choosing one of three random symbols and crossing your fingers in the hope of seeing a poorly pixelated bum sounds like your idea of a good time, this is for you. ■

FACT

The manual instead describes the game as 'Stone, Scissors, Cloth', so fair play to Sachen for at least cutting down on paper waste.

HOT SLOTS

Year 1991
Publisher Panesian
Developer Hacker International

ORIGINALLY CREATED BY Japanese developer Hacker International and released for the Famicom as AV Pachi Slot, Hot Slots (or Hot Slot, as the title screen puts it) is one of three adult games Taiwanese publisher Panesian brought to North America. It's basically a slot machine where scoring the jackpot shows you one of three women – Silver Dollar Sally, Lucky Lucy and Two Nickle (sic) Nancy – wearing very little and using some badly-spelled one-liners. 'I can see you've got some stiff competition in your hends' is one particularly illiterate illustration, as is the iconic: 'Wow! What a manly player! Are you going to rack up my charries?'. Don't worry: as soon as I find out what charries are, consider them racked. ■

FACT

All three women make references to their 'slot', which given this is a slot machine game is frankly just lazy.

HUGE INSECT

Year 1993
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

THE LAST GAME released by Sachen, Huge Insect is obscenely rare because it was never sold in stores. It's basically a bug-based clone of Galaga where you control a can of bug spray and have to fire at insects as they fly into formation and swoop down exactly like they do in Namco's arcade shooter. Only ten copies of Huge Insect in its original green box were originally sent out to customers in 1993, but the game was reprinted three more times: twice in 2002 (15 copies in an orange box, 18 in a blue box) and again in 2005 (35 copies in a purple box). This means only a total of 78 copies were ever sold, though naturally those ten green boxes are a holy grail for collectors. ■

FACT

True to its name, a huge insect appears as a boss at the end of each stage.

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION II

Year 1989
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Novotrade

IN 1984 EPYX developed and published Impossible Mission, a much-loved secret agent game where players had to explore an evil genius's lair. The sequel follows on from the events of the original and has you entering the fortress of Elvin Atombender, the mad professor planning a missile launch.

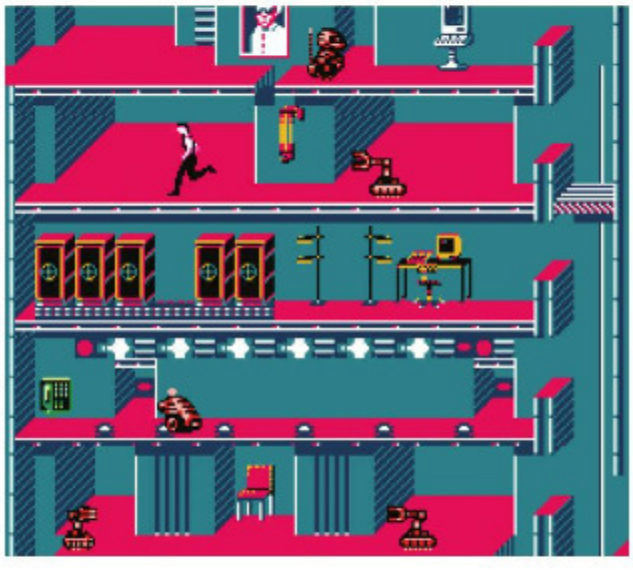
Beating the game involves a convoluted process which takes you through the fortress's eight differently-themed towers. In each tower you must find scraps of paper and assemble them like a jigsaw to spell out a three-digit security code. You then have to find the musical sequence hidden inside each tower's safe, two of which are duplicates and must be erased. Then you have to shuffle the musical sequences so they make an entire melody before you can reach the main control room, where you finally have to decide which is the correct terminal to disable the missile.

Naturally, the game was notorious for being difficult, and that extends to the main gameplay too. As in the first Impossible Mission, Elvin's fortress is swarming with security robots, which have to be dodged to avoid instant death. There are six different types of robots and many of them are conveniently placed to be a nuisance and get in the way while you're trying to search the various desks and cabinets in each room (which takes a while, complete with a progress bar).

Impossible Mission II is one of the better unlicensed NES games. It may not be very inviting when you first play it, but once you get used to what's expected of you it becomes compelling. ■

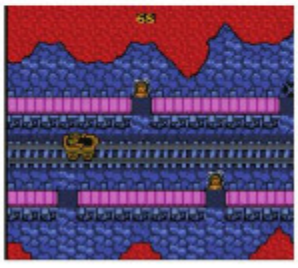
FACT

The first Impossible Mission was well-known among many gamers for having digitised speech, something rare at the time. When you start the game, Elvin says 'another visitor: stay a while, stay forever.'



INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM

Year 1988
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen



IF YOU'VE BEEN reading through this book in order, firstly: congratulations, you're nearly at the end. Secondly, you may be getting a slight sense of deja vu, because Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom was already listed in the section of the book dedicated to licensed NES games. That's because it was originally released by Tengen as one of its sneaky lock-out chip busting unlicensed games, before Nintendo decided to take Tengen to court. While the legal discussions continued to take place, the Indy game was pulled from shelves and the publication rights were passed on to Mindscape, which re-released the game as an officially licensed title. This unlicensed version is a little rarer, but not to a drastic degree. ■

FACT

The legal battle between Nintendo and Tengen (or rather its parent company Atari) rumbled on for a number of years until Nintendo eventually won.

JACKPOT

Year 1988
Publisher HES
Developer Bit Corporation

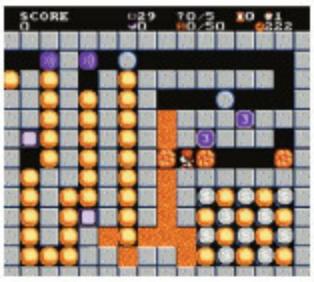
'ARE YOU MAD on the 'pokies'?' That's the bizarre question the single-page instruction sheet for Australian publisher HES's Jackpot asks you before you start to play the game. Before you're concerned that it's referring to another Hot Slots situation, 'pokies' is an Australian term for 'poker machines', or slot machines. Jackpot, then, is little more than a slot machine simulator with not a shred of debauchery or nudity in sight. The slot machine featured in Jackpot is a little more detailed than other NES efforts, since it also includes a double-or-nothing guessing game where you have to guess whether the next number is going to be higher or lower. You start with $1,000 and lose when it's all gone. ■

FACT

The instruction sheet also congratulates any 'losers' reading for being 'smart enough to have invested in this game knowing that you can have endless hours of fun without losing your shirt'.

JOSHUA & THE BATTLE OF JERICHO

Year 1992
Publisher Wisdom Tree
Developer Wisdom Tree



NOT A RECREATION of a lesser-known wrestling match starring WWE superstar Chris Jericho, but instead a sequel to Wisdom Tree's religious game Exodus. Much like Crystal Mines begat Exodus, so too does Joshua & the Battle of Jericho draw heavy inspiration from Boulder Dash. This time you're playing as Joshua, the leader of Israel who infiltrated and pillaged the city of Jericho by toppling its walls with their trumpets. The game includes another 100 new stages where the aim is to 'fulfil the Lord's object quota' by collecting enough iron, brass silver and gold to trigger the exit, all while firing musical notes at enemies. After each stage you'll be asked five questions about the book of Joshua, so you'd better have been paying attention. ■

FACT

Somewhat impressively for a Wisdom Tree game, when you start you hear some digitised speech saying: 'Be courageous, Joshua.'

JOVIAL RACE

Year 1989
Publisher Sachen
Developer Joy Van

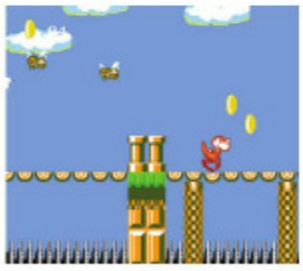
THE AWARD FOR cheeriest NES game title must surely go to Jovial Race. Presumably it didn't make Namco smile too much, though, as the game is a blatant imitation of its racecar maze game Rally-X. The aim is to drive your 'jovial car' around each maze (there are 75 stages in total) while avoiding the enemies trying to crash into you. If any get too close for comfort, you can drop smoke behind you to stun them. Sachen once again knocks it out of the park with its badly written box synopsis: 'With that incredible Jovial Car any thing could happen. I'm not going to tell you everything, you better come with me and experience this unforgettable trip in your life time.' ■

FACT

You'll occasionally come across a dog, duck or rabbit walking around the track. If you hit any of them you'll lose money (which is used to buy weapons).

JURASSIC BOY

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen



JURASSIC BOY (OR Jurassic Boy 2, as the title screen suggests) is a fairly shameless imitation of Sonic the Hedgehog, complete with loop-the-loops and a coin-collecting system that works exactly like rings do in a Sonic game. It isn't entirely without imagination, though: its plot is bizarre. It's set in the year 2197, where dinosaurs have become popular again. Scientists have started making new ones, but they're missing a certain gene and without it they're considered incomplete. Countries start buying fossils for crazy prices in an attempt to extract the gene, but meanwhile the mad Dr Crachi invents a time machine and goes back in time to steal some actual dinosaurs. You play as Chen, who has to rescue his kidnapped family from Dr Crachi. All that for a Sonic clone. ■

FACT

Jurassic Boy 2 was released on the Game Boy Color, but was borderline unplayable because the camera's zoomed so close to Chen.

KING NEPTUNE'S ADVENTURE

Year 1990
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams

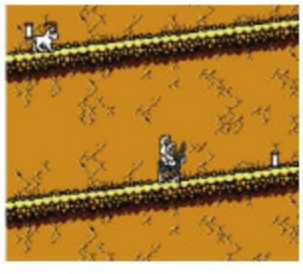
ONE OF THE very few Color Dream games to make it to Europe, King Neptune's Adventure puts you in the… um, fins of the king himself as he tries to restore peace to his ocean kingdom. A mysterious dark beast has stolen the magical Orb of Peace – the last and most powerful of Neptune's treasures – so you have to swim through the game's maze-like environments to find and defeat the creature responsible (it's a giant black octopus, in case you were wondering). As well as the ability to throw 'Bolts of Goodness' at enemies, Neptune can also collect Bubble Bombs which can be manually detonated. It was released in France, albeit with the French information typed onto a sheet of paper and glued to the box. ■

FACT

Some versions of the cartridge had a label on the back promoting a competition where players had to find a hidden pot of gold in the game. It was never claimed.

KING OF KINGS: THE EARLY YEARS

Year 1991
Publisher Wisdom Tree
Developer Wisdom Tree



DESPITE SOUNDING LIKE a rock documentary, King of Kings: The Early Years is instead a compilation of games based on Bible stories from when Jesus was young. The first game, The Wise Men, has you controlling Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar one at a time as they ride their camel towards Bethlehem. Oh, and the camel can spit at enemies, just like in the Bible. The second game, Flight to Egypt, plays similarly to the first and follows Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus as they travel to Egypt on the back of a donkey. Finally, Jesus and the Temple retells the story of a 12-year-old Jesus being left behind the the temple in Jerusalem, with you playing as Joseph as he tries to head back to the temple to get him. ■

FACT

There are two versions of the game: one with a picture of a Wise Man riding a camel on the cover, and another with a picture of Mary and Joseph holding baby Jesus.

KLAX

Year 1990
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

A REGULAR SIGHT in arcades in the early '90s, Klax is a match-three puzzle game similar to Dr. Mario or Columns, but a slightly more complicated one. You control a small platform sitting at the end of a conveyor belt. As coloured tiles roll down the screen, you have to first catch them on your platform before dropping them into the play area at the bottom. You can stack up to five tiles on your platform, and if you have too many you can shoot them back onto the belt (though you'll need to be ready to catch them again). This makes for a more high-pressure puzzle game, and it's rare for players to get anywhere near the last of its 100 stages. ■

FACT

The NES version of Klax has a 'Stuff' option on the main menu which includes Blob Ball, a basic mini-game where you have to stop an erratically bouncing green ball landing on a set of spikes.

KRAZY KREATURES

Year 1990
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Franz Lanzinger & Dave O'Riva

ONE OF THE hidden unlicensed NES gems, Krazy Keature's basic-looking graphics actually hide a simple yet addictive shape-matching game. Each of its 32 stages begins by throwing a bunch of small shapes onto the screen: initially these are shaped like cats and dogs but as the game progresses you have to deal with chattering teeth, pink elephants, skulls and monsters. The aim is simply to pick up shapes with the A button and drop them elsewhere on the stage to match up a certain number, clearing them off. It sounds too simple to be fun but it really is, especially when another player joins in for co-op play and you're both clearing the screen together. Proof that looks don't mean everything in gaming. ■

FACT

Beat the game for a message from the programmers: 'Sorry, but we did not do the kind of splashy ending that you might expect, and besides, very few will ever get this far.'

LITTLE RED HOOD

Year 1989
Publisher Sachen
Developer Joy Van

IT WOULD APPEAR that not all hoods are suitable for riding, as Little Red Hood illustrates. Don't let its oddly truncated title fool you, though: this is still very much based on the popular fairy tale. Playing as Little Red Hood, you have to make your way through the dangerous woods to your grandmother's house while avoiding snakes, monkeys, goblins and of course the 'Big Wolf' (clearly sticking with the 'remove a word' naming convention). In each of its ten stages the aim is to perform a certain task (which is never explicitly explained) to make a key to the exit appear: sometimes this is simple as finding a hidden staircase, but in other stages it's a more obtuse task like buying certain items. ■

FACT

Occasionally Little Red Hood will find her dog, who will run around attacking enemies for her.

LOCKSMITH

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

ESPIONAGE ISN'T ALWAYS all it's cracked up to be, as Locksmith proves. Playing as a top spy called Captain Red-Hat Jack, your mission is to infiltrate the enemy's Defence Information Centre and steal its top secret plans. To do that you have to do two things: make your way through a maze of rooms while avoiding the gunfire from enemy agents, then when you reach the safe use your top-notch locksmith abilities to crack it open. These safe-cracking sections are sliding puzzles where you have to rearrange shapes in a grid to form matching horizontal and vertical lines. Crack the lock and you'll move onto the next stage, where the building and puzzle go from 3×3 grids to 4×4. This continues until you reach 8×8 grids. ■

FACT

You can skip the easier levels in the game and go straight to the main challenge by holding A, B and Select on the title screen and pressing Up and Down to change your level or Left and Right to change the difficulty.

LUCKY BINGO

Year 1989
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

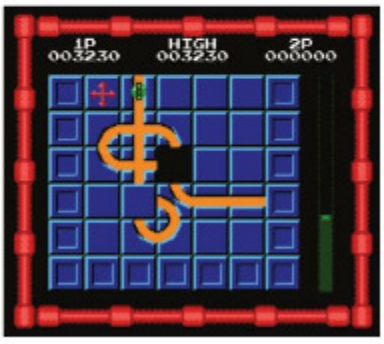
ALSO KNOWN AS Lucky 777, this is an extremely basic slot machine game where you essentially have infinite money. Pressing the A button at any time adds 1,000 coins to your account, and it only costs 3 coins to play, so it's clear that Sachen expects you to be in this one for the long haul. It's your standard three-row slot machine where you can score for matching three symbols on any of the rows, or either diagonal. There is a point to all of this, and since it's a Sachen game you can probably guess what it is. As you earn certain numbers of coins you'll be shown images of women in progressively fewer items of clothing. Just in case gambling fake money wasn't good enough. ■

FACT

According to the manual: 'You stake a sum of money on this machine is a right decision, because in reality it won't lose your money.'

MAGIC BLOCK

Year 1991
Publisher CCE / Gluk Video
Developer Mega Soft



THIS QUIRKY LITTLE puzzler plays like a cross between one of those annoying sliding puzzle games and Pipe Dream / Pipemania. There's a small green ball travelling across a path, and you have to make sure it crosses every section of that path to clear the level. The problem is, the path's split up into smaller squares and you're going to have to rearrange them. Whereas in Pipe Dream you're given pieces to place onto the grid, in Magic Block the pieces are already on the grid and you have to slide them around in advance before the ball reaches them. There are 60 stages in all, and while it can get a little tricky for the most part it's fairly manageable for a slide puzzle game. ■

FACT

Magic Block usually appears in multicarts, but was released as a standalone game in Spain (as El Bloque Magico) and Brazil.

MAGIC CARPET 1001

Year 1991
Publisher CCE / Gluk Video
Developer Mega Soft

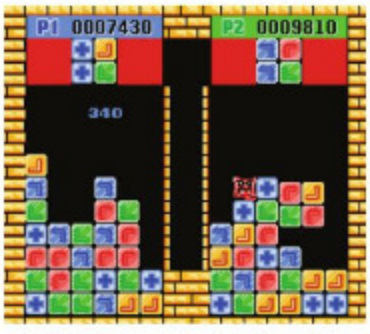
DON'T WORRY IF you haven't played the first 1,000 Magic Carpet games, I can assure you this is actually the first in the series. Another game that was part of the Caltron 6 in 1 cartridge but got a separate release in Spain and Brazil, Magic Carpet 1001 is a side-scrolling shoot 'em up where you play as none other than Aladdin himself. The princess of Baghdad has been captured by an outer space devil tribe (note: this may not be canon) so Aladdin sets out on his magic carpet to save the day. He's armed with a bow and arrow which was given to him by the genie, but considering devil aliens are fair game you'd have thought a bazooka would have been available. ■

FACT

The final stage takes place in outer space where Aladdin has to defeat a set of teleporting teeth.

MAGIC CUBE

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen



'HAVE YOU EVER played with Russian Blocks?' the Magic Cube packaging blurb asks, clearly referring to Tetris. 'And have you played with Magical Stone?' it continues, referring to Columns. Apparently Magic Cube is supposed to combine the two, but it plays a lot more like the latter. Blocks of varying colours drop into the well and you have to arrange them to match three of the same colour. If you clear at least two sets in a combo, a little goblin will appear for a limited time. Land a block of the same colour on its head and you'll squash it, gaining extra points. There are countless Columns clones out there, but at least Magic Cube tries something a little different. ■

FACT

Every Sachen game came with an 'evaluation sheet' at the back of the manual, where players had to fill out a questionnaire saying what they thought about the game.

MAGIC JEWELRY II

Year 1991
Publisher RCM
Developer Hwang Shinwei

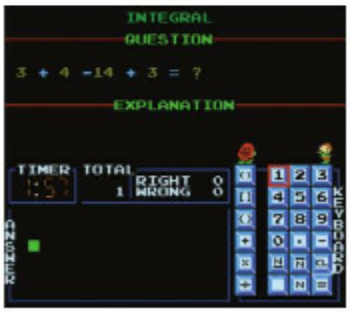
WHILE MAGIC CUBE borrowed some elements from Sega's Columns, Magic Jewelry II lifts the entire game mechanics outright. The rules are identical: vertical columns of three coloured jewels fall down the well, and you can shuffle the order of the colours with the A and B buttons. Match three jewels of the same colour and they'll disappear. Although it's a direct imitation of Columns it could be argued that it does a few things better: the animated background shows a nifty image of the Statue of Liberty that changes colour as the moon rises behind it, and there are also six alternative tile sets if you prefer playing with dice, fruit or types of hat (although these are harder to play with since they're harder to distinguish). ■

FACT

The first Magic Jewelry was only released on the Famicom, but it's more or less the same game with slightly less detailed jewels.

MAGICAL MATHEMATICS

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen



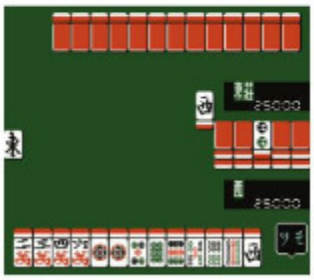
DON'T BE PUT off by the opening animation of what appears to be a goblin's hand using an abacus: Magical Mathematics (also known as Math Quiz) promises to be a child-friendly learning experience. There are four categories of question here: integral (whole numbers only), fractions, equations with one unknown (solving for x) and compound exercises. Players use a number pad to enter their answers, which are stomped in by a little man who jumps on the keys. There's an actual 'game' to speak of here too, called Mathematic Blocks: here the screen fills with numbered blocks and you can remove two at a time, but only if they can fit into the equations provided at the side of the screen. ■

FACT

According to the back of the box, 'Mathematic Blocks is going to train you as a man with super brain'. So that's something to look forward to.

MAHJANG COMPANION

Year 1990
Publisher Thin Chen
Developer Thin Chen



NO, THAT ISN'T a typo. I mean, it is, but it isn't ours: this one does indeed refer to Mahjang and not Mahjong. It's a one-on-one mahjong game where you choose one of four female 'companions' to play against (you already know where this is going). The game's based on the Japanese version of mahjong, which means each player gets 13 tiles. The aim is to form 'melds' with all 13 of your tiles (these could be a pair, or three or four matching tiles, or three sequential tiles). Sure enough, every time you beat your opponent in a round, she'll remove an item of clothing: at which point anyone who bought the game thinking 'companion' meant it helped teach them mahjong will realise their mistake. ■

FACT

The different types of meld in this game are a Pair (two of the same tile), Pung (three of the same tile), Kong (four of the same tile) and Chow (three sequential tiles of the same suit).

MAHJONG ACADEMY

Year 1992
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

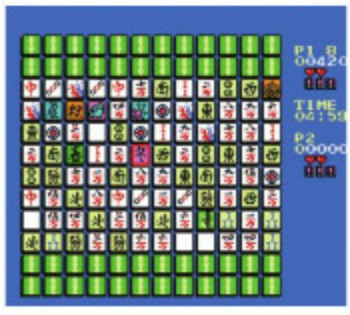
IN CASE YOU'RE curious, the reason there were so many mahjong games on the NES is because it's been massively popular throughout Eastern and Southeast Asia for centuries. As a company based in Taiwan, Sachen published a lot of mahjong games and released them on both Famicom and NES cartridges. Mahjong Academy is yet another example of this: it offers a series of one-on-one games of Japanese-style mahjong against another selection of attractive ladies, this time accompanied by an 8-bit version of Frank Sinatra's *Fly Me to the Moon*. A number of other NES mahjong games are also one-on-one affairs: this isn't considered ideal, because mahjong is usually played with four (or three, in some variations). ■

FACT

According to a 2007 study, playing too much mahjong in real life can lead to epileptic seizures, possibly due to the stress involved.

MAHJONG TRAP

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Hacker International



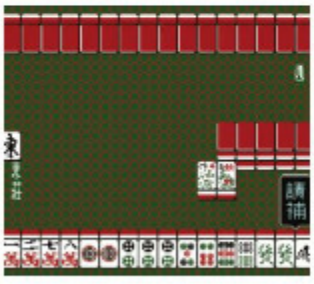
IF YOU AREN'T familiar with the rules of competitive mahjong, solitaire versions may be more to your liking. Mahjong Trap doesn't follow the exact same rules as most popular mahjong solitaire games like Shanghai: instead it uses rules similar to Sachen's other game Happy Pairs, in which you can remove pairs of matching tiles if you can connect them by a path that makes up no more than three straight lines. As is the case with all games developed by Japanese studio Hacker International, completing a series of levels will see you rewarded with images of women wearing fewer and fewer sets of clothing. By this point you'd be forgiven for thinking mahjong was little more than a front for more sordid endeavours. ■

FACT

Hacker International's penchant for video game nudity even extended to its Famicom game AV Soccer, where cheerleaders got naked for you if you won the cup.

THE MAHJONG WORLD

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Hacker International



YET ANOTHER MAHJONG game courtesy of Sachen and developed by Hacker International. The 'World' part of the title refers to the fact that there are two different types of mahjong available here. As well as the Japanese style mahjong rules which tend to be commonplace in most NES mahjong games, there's also an option to play with Taiwanese mahjong rules, where players get 16 tiles to start with instead of 13 in the Japanese rule set (among other rule changes that a quarter-page in a book can't really cover). There's also a third option, a sort of career mode where you start off playing a modified version of Taiwanese mahjong and eventually move on to Japanese mahjong where, yes, naked women start appearing again. ■

FACT

The game is credited to L. C. Tchacvosky, which is a pseudonym for Li Cheang Ma, a Taiwanese developer who helped program many of Sachen's games.

MASTER CHU AND THE DRUNKARD HU

Year 1989
Publisher Color Dreams / Sachen
Developer Joy Van

A SMALL VILLAGE in the Far East has been cursed by Shiva, the legendary god of destruction, and plagued with evil spirits as a result. A kung fu master named Hu tries countless times to drive out Shiva's demons, but his continued failures drive him to the bottle and he becomes an alcoholic. Step forward his best friend, Master Chu, who tries to save the day on his drunken friend's behalf. This is an action platformer where Chu (and Hu, if you want to play simultaneous co-op) has to make his way through 10 worlds collecting yin-ying symbols. If you collect eight you'll be sent to fight the boss of that stage, who'll give up the key to the next stage if you defeat them. ■

FACT

The boss fights take place against the likes of a tree called Stump Stomper, an evil elf called... um, Evil Elf, and the self-explanatory Enchanted Stone Head.

MAXI 15

Year 1992
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Various

IN 1992, AVE paid for a 15-minute infomercial for its new cartridge, MaxiVision. Hosted by WWF superstar Hulk Hogan, it boasted 30 games on one cart for the 'low' price of $150. Ultimately the finished product wasn't quite as ambitious as expected, containing only 15 games. Oddly, for a product promoted with an ad clearly aimed at children, one of these games is gory light gun game Chiller. The rest are a mix of games from other developers, including Sachen's Double Strike and Pyramid, Idea-Tek's F-15 City War and AVE's own Krazy Kreatures. Presumably due to reasons to do with the contract, a later version of Maxi 15 removed the two Sachen games and replaced them with Death Race and Blackjack. ■

FACT

The infomercial featured a number of other WWF superstars, including the Honky Tonk Man, Koko B. Ware and 'Mr Wonderful' Paul Orndorff.

MENACE BEACH

Year 1990
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams

YOUR 'SASSY BUT lovable' girlfriend Bunny has failed to turn up for your date at the malt shop, but there's a good reason for it: she's been kidnapped by Demon Dan and chained to a wall (which seems a tad severe). You have to hop on your skateboard and rescue her, while dealing with seemingly every person in town because everyone – from dock workers and clowns to sumo wrestlers and ninjas – are out to get you for some reason. Although you're on a skateboard, Menace Beach controls like a normal platformer rather than the auto-scroller you may expect. The game's best known for its odd cutscenes between each stage, where an angry Bunny insults you for not rescuing her quickly enough, while her clothes literally rot away. ■

FACT

You can enter a code on the title screen to skip levels. For once, the game calls you out on this, flashing a message saying: 'YOU BIG CHEATERHEAD'.

MERMAIDS OF ATLANTIS

Year 1991
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer C&E

IF YOU LIKED the idea of Bubble Bath Babes but weren't too keen on playing a game with a naked woman lying permanently at the bottom of the screen, Mermaids of Atlantis is the video game equivalent of people who bought Playboy to read the articles. It's an almost identical game with exactly the same mechanics – float shapes made of coloured bubbles up to the top of the screen and try to match four coloured bubbles to make them disappear – to the extent that even the music is the same. The only major difference is that the nude lady draped across the bottom of the screen in Bubble Bath Babes is now a mermaid: that's to say, it's the same sprite with a tail and clamshell bikini added. ■

FACT

Mermaids of Atlantis does have a plot, at least: an evil chap called Emperor O-Dinton kidnaps some Merpeople with the plan to sell them in rubber bubbles.

METAL FIGHTER

Year 1989
Publisher Color Dreams / Sachen
Developer Joy Van

SPARE A THOUGHT for poor little robot MCS-920, affectionately nicknamed Metal Fighter. It's been off fighting intergalactic missions for three centuries, and when it returns to its home planet H17 it finds it's been overrun by alien invaders and its inhabitants have been driven underground. It's up to Metal Fighter to fight off the alien tyrants and destroy the final boss, the giant Spidercraft, to free H17 from its extraterrestrial shackles. The game is a side-scrolling shoot 'em up and while for the most part this entails flying around like a normal ship-based shooter, on occasion MCS-920 will lose its flying abilities and have to run on the ground, shooting and jumping, until it can fly again. ■

FACT

The original Taiwanese version of Metal Fighter was called Joyvan Kid: presumably developer Joy Van wanted to make MCS-920 its mascot.

MICRO MACHINES

Year 1991
Publisher Camerica / Codemasters
Developer Codemasters

THE MASSIVELY POPULAR miniature toy car line Micro Machines was first launched in 1987 by Galoob (which is now owned by Hasbro). When Codemasters developed the Game Genie for the NES in 1990, its North American release was handled by Camerica in Canada, who in turn agreed to make Galoob the US distributor. During this alliance between the three companies, Galoob gave Codemasters the licence to make a racing game based on Micro Machines.

Originally based on a prototype game called California Buggy Boys, Micro Machines is a top-down racing game where you get to race a wide variety of toy cars through a series of novelty oversized real-world tracks. After all, because real-life Micro Machines are roughly an inch and a half long, it would be a bit silly to have them racing on full-sized courses.

Instead players find themselves racing sports cars across school desks, Formula One cars on pool tables, dune buggies on a children's sandpit, speedboats in a bathtub and four-by-fours on a kitchen table during breakfast time.

The game consists of 32 different races and in each you take part against a trio of racers taken from the game's roster of 11 characters. If you finish third or fourth in a race you lose a life, but this goes for the CPU opponents too: a good strategy, then, is to choose to race against the expert drivers like Spider and Bonnie first so they're eliminated and replaced with weaker opponents by the time you get to the later stages. ■

FACT

The sequel Micro Machines 2 featured Violet Berlin, the host of UK children's video game show *Bad Influence!*, as one of the opponents.

MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH

Year 1989
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

MAINLY RELEASED IN Asia and designed to teach native Chinese speakers how to speak English, Middle School English consists of ten separate lessons, each introducing 7–10 new words. At the start of each lesson, players are shown the English words and what they mean in Chinese. Once they think they've learned them, players then press Start to move onto the next section, where only the Chinese word is shown and using an on-screen keyboard they have to enter what they think the English equivalent is. Perhaps realising that educational games aren't always fun for whoever's playing them, Sachen added a bonus to Middle School English: every time players manage to beat a lesson, they get to play Sachen's puzzle game Pyramid. ■

FACT

Example words and phrases in the game include 'good morning', 'how are you', 'sit down', 'television' and 'classroom'.

MIG-29: SOVIET FIGHTER

Year 1989
Publisher Camerica / Codemasters
Developer Codemasters

IT'S A HARD sell trying to make people buy a product that promotes the aircraft of your country's enemy, but that's exactly what Codemasters and Camerica tried to do when they released MiG-29 in North America as the Cold War neared (but hadn't quite yet reached) its end. Cue some inventive story-twisting: it's set in the near future, where the US and USSR are now allies and world peace has been realised. This peace is disturbed when Colonel Crackov, the powerful KGB commander who went missing years previously, reappears with a terrorist army and missiles stolen from NATO. You play as Yuri Nuriyev, a KGB captain and MiG-29 pilot whose mission it is to end Crackov's plans. You see, you're Russian, but you're fighting for America, so it's okay. ■

FACT

The game consists of two play styles: third-person combat similar to After Burner, and top-down 'close combat' sections which play like a vertical shoot 'em up.

MILLIONAIRE

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

IF YOU'VE ALWAYS wanted to play a Monopoly game that doesn't have any official connection to the actual Monopoly then firstly, that's a strange desire to have, and secondly, Millionaire should suit that need. In all but name, Millionaire is essentially an unlicensed clone of Monopoly, as up to four players try to buy properties and collect rent in an attempt to make their opponents bankrupt. The only major difference is that Millionaire doesn't deal with street names like Monopoly does, so there's no Mayfair or Pall Mall (or Broadway or Boardwalk, if you're of the American persuasion). Instead you're buying countries, with Monaco and South Korea being the least expensive nations to buy and Japan and North Korea(!) being the most valuable. ■

FACT

When you win a game, you see a strange cutscene of your character celebrating his wealth, saying: 'Oh, money, house, car, everything is so fantastic.'

MISSION COBRA

Year 1989
Publisher Bunch Games
Developer Sachen

THIS BASIC VERTICAL scrolling shoot 'em up sees you controlling a helicopter as numerous enemies fly towards you. Your fuel is constantly depleting, so you need to keep it topped up with energy power-ups. You can also collect various shot power-ups but, again, these are nothing revolutionary: twin shot, triple shot, wide shot and four-way shot. There are three stages, each ending with a boss battle: the first takes place over the sea and ends with you facing a battleship, the second is high up in the clouds and leads to a showdown against a bird-shaped plane, and the third is set in space and concludes with a battle against what appears to be a giant flying metal badger-shaped spaceship of some sort. ■

FACT

Once you beat the badger boss, the game will loop: Stage 4 will be Stage 1 again and you'll be expected to have forgotten the strange thing you just fought.

MOON RANGER

Year 1990
Publisher Bunch Games
Developer Odyssey Software

IT'S SAID THAT Color Dreams set up the Bunch Games label as a way of releasing poorer quality games so that the already iffy reputation of the Color Dreams name wouldn't be harmed any further. That tells you what you need to know about Moon Ranger, a space-themed game that's part sluggish side-scrolling shoot 'em up and part equally sluggish action platformer. You play as Moon Ranger, a hero who's been sent to the moon to destroy the Element Converter, a dormant spacecraft lying on the moon's surface. It was put there by aliens, you see, and was programmed to harvest the solar system's valuable resources. You have to blow it up before the Earth is starved of its nutrients and is destroyed. ■

FACT

Some of the enemies in the platforming sections are alien heads that will kill you if you come into contact with them. They're cheerily named Faces of Death.

MS. PAC-MAN

Year 1990
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

ALTHOUGH TENGEN'S UNOFFICIAL version of Ms. Pac-Man predates the officially licensed Namco version by three years, it's actually a much better game. While Namco's NES offering is a straight port of the arcade game with no bells or whistles, Tengen's take has a bunch of extra options that make it far more enjoyable. These include a Pac Booster mode where you can press a button to make Ms. Pac-Man move faster, the option to choose different types of mazes from those featured in the arcade game, and – best of all – a co-operative 2-player mode in which Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man appear on-screen at the same time and work on clearing each maze together. Proof that official doesn't always mean best. ■

FACT

The 2-player mode has co-op and competitive options. In competitive, each player has their own score and eating a power pellet means the other player can't eat dots or ghosts until it wears off.

OLYMPIC IQ

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

OLYMPIC IQ IS a compilation of five mini-games based on classic logic puzzles. The first is a river crossing puzzle, where you have to carry all your animals from one side to the other without them eating each other. In the second you have to move a pyramid of blocks from one side of the screen to the other, piece by piece. The third asks you to fit 31 blocks into a grid without two of the same colour touching, and the fourth gives you 8–12 cannonballs and makes you figure out, by using a scale no more than five times, which single ball is heavier or lighter than the rest. Finally, the Duke's Treasure game has you moving Tetris-style objects from one room to another. ■

FACT

The river game is usually played with foxes and chickens but this version is made more complicated by giving you an elephant, tiger, dog, cat and mouse instead.

OPERATION SECRET STORM

Year 1991
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams

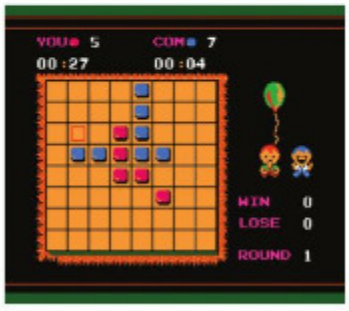
ONE OF THE benefits of unlicensed games is you don't need to worry about being clever or careful by using characters who only bear a passing resemblance to real-life people: you just add them. That's why Operation Secret Storm has you playing as actual George H. W. Bush as he fights the Iraqi army and tries to kill actual Saddam Hussein (renamed Saddam Insane). It's an action platformer which starts you off in Basra (where you have to kick an eagle to death, which seems oddly unpatriotic) and takes you through a bunch of other stereotypical locations like an oil field and a Middle Eastern style town before you fight Saddam himself and kick him until he literally explodes. Just to confirm: all this happens. ■

FACT

Just in case the point isn't driven home enough, the manual lists some of the enemies as 'jihads', 'bedouins', 'nucloids' and, of course, six-feet tall red ants.

OTHELLO

Year 1988
Publisher HES
Developer Bit Corporation



NOT TO BE confused with the officially licensed and Acclaim-published Othello game also released in 1988, this Bit Corporation-developed version was released in Australia by New South Wales publisher Home Entertainment Suppliers. The rules are exactly the same: each player has to surround their opponent's pieces with their own in order to flip them over and claim them, with the aim being to fill the board with as many of your own pieces as possible by the end of the game. As well as the obligatory two-player option you can play against three different levels of CPU opponent. Instead of the usual Easy, Medium and Hard options you'd expect, though, this game goes for the slightly more exotic Primary, Medium and Senior. ■

FACT

The title screen has a image of a giant cartoon man sitting on a chair and smoking a cigar, for no apparent reason.

PAC-MAN

Year 1988
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

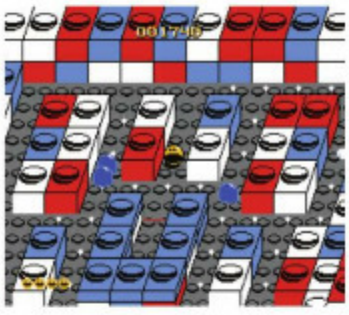
PAC-MAN IS ONE of the three titles Tengen released as an officially licensed game before it figured out how to break Nintendo's lock-out chip and decided to go rogue. This unlicensed version, then, is exactly the same as the licensed one, with the only real differences being the removal of Nintendo's Seal of Quality on the cover and the change from a standard grey Nintendo cartridge to Tengen's own bespoke black cartridge. If you're a die-hard Pac-Man collector, then, you may want to own all four 8-bit Nintendo versions of the game – Namco's original Famicom version, the licensed Tengen one, the unlicensed Tengen one and Namco's NES one – even though all four are exactly the same game with different title screens. ■

FACT

The 'Pac-Man defence' is an economic term which refers to a company that's about to be bought over turning the tables and acquiring its would-be buyers instead.

PAC-MANIA

Year 1990
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen



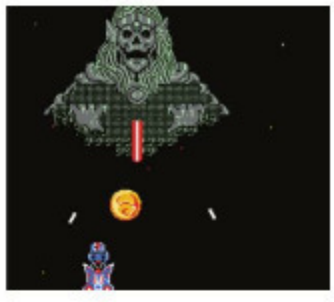
THE WORLDWIDE SUCCESS of Pac-Man led to Namco looking for ways to keep the momentum going. The likes of Ms. Pac-Man, Super Pac-Man and Pac & Pal only kept players happy for a while, and it was clear a complete overhaul was needed. The result was Pac-Mania, which switches the action to an isometric viewpoint and gives Pac-Man the ability to jump over enemies. The NES version is a relatively faithful rendition containing all four world types: the Lego-like Block Town, the old-school Pac-Man's Park, the pyramid-themed Sandbox Land and the rail-free Jungly Steps. In later stages the ghosts also get the ability to jump, meaning your spammy aversion techniques no longer work and you need to resort to the more traditional 'running away' tactic. ■

FACT

As well as the usual four ghosts Inky, Binky, Pinky and Clyde, Pac-Mania also includes the purple ghost Sue from Ms. Pac-Man and two jumping ghosts, Funky and Spunky.

PAPILLON GALS

Year 1989
Publisher Sachen
Developer Joy Van / Hacker International



SOMETIMES JAPANESE DEVELOPER Hacker International – master of jamming nudity into any NES game it could get its hands on, no matter how tenuous the reason – would take an existing game, make absolutely no changes to the main code, make a new title and simply slot in pornography. That's the case with Papillon Gals (or just Papillon, according to the title screen), which is just Galactic Crusader – the vertically scrolling shoot 'em up mentioned earlier in this book – with different music, a palette change for the final boss and the addition of low-res nude pics every time you beat a level. It's never explained, it isn't part of the story. It's just a case of 'well done, here's some boobies'. ■

FACT

If you really must get a game because of its nudity, Papillon Gals is a poor choice. It's quite a difficult shooter to the extent that beating the first level may be beyond some gamers' reach.

PEEK-A-BOO POKER

Year 1991
Publisher Panesian
Developer Hacker International

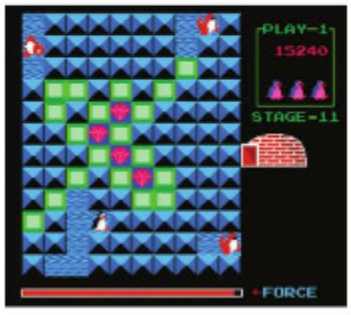
THE FINAL GAME in the 'unholy trilogy' of exceedingly rare adult games released by Panesian, along with Bubble Bath Babes and Hot Slots. Peek-a-Boo Poker is a modified version of the Famicom-only game Pu Nu Jing Ling, with Hacker International's trademark nude ladies thrown in to make it a strip poker game. There are three female opponents to choose from – Full House Francine, Double Dealing Debbie and Pok-er Penny – and each gives you some suitably terrible 'sexy' lines every time you win a round and make them remove an item of clothing. 'I know what you're thinking, and you can deal me in' is probably one of the safest examples fit for printing in this book. ■

FACT

All three Panesian games are considered very rare, and getting boxed copies of all three could set you back more than $3,500.

THE PENGUIN & SEAL

Year 1989
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen



ALSO RELEASED IN Australia by HES as Arctic Adventure, The Penguin & Seal is a block-pushing puzzle game starring a penguin who goes by the exceedingly descriptive name of Mr Penguin. As a 'great pioneer', Mr Penguin decides he wants to collect every diamond located in the Arctic Circle, which conveniently comes to around 50 stages' worth. The aim is to collect all the diamonds and drop them off at your igloo, but that's easier said than done because each stage is filled with blue and green blocks. Blue ones disappear when you push them against something, green ones are indestructible. On top of this, there are seals roaming around each level and they can kill Mr Penguin with one touch. ■

FACT

The Penguin & Seal also has a 'Construction' mode, where you can create your own stages for your amusement.

PESTERMINATOR: THE WESTERN EXTERMINATOR

Year 1990
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams

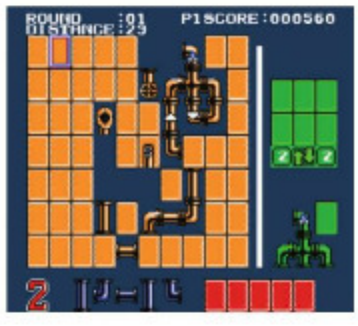
PESTERMINATOR MAY NOT only be the most obscure tie-in on the NES, it might be the most obscure tie-in on any gaming system. It stars Kernel Kleanup, the 'familiar character' (the manual's words, not mine) from the logo for Western Exterminator Company, a pest control service in Anaheim. Ronnie the Super Rat is launching a hostile takeover of Earth, so Kernel Kleanup has to use his mallet to squash every single bug to make his way through nine levels. Starting off in a house, you make your way through a hotel, a couple of warehouses, a mansion, a swamp and the sea before making your way to the moon and fighting Ronnie there. Easily the best game ever made for a real-life pest control company. ■

FACT

Western Exterminator Company is still going strong in Anaheim, and it still has Kernel Kleanup as its mascot. Whether he's 'familiar' yet is debatable.

PIPE 5

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen



ON THE SURFACE, Pipe 5 (or Pipe V, as the Sachen packaging says) looks like a direct imitation of Pipe Dream / Pipemania. Liquid flows out of a pipe, and you have to join together separate smaller sections of pipe to create a route for it to flow down and prevent it spilling or getting blocked. It quickly becomes clear, though, that there's more to Pipe 5 than there is at first glance. There are actually multiple floors on each stage here, each with their own grids. There are now valves and open pipes dotted around the play area: if the liquid goes through a valve it'll travel down to the grid underneath, and if it goes through an open pipe it'll travel up to the grid above. ■

FACT

If the Pipemania connection wasn't clear enough, Australian publisher HES actually released Pipe 5 under the name Pipemania.

POKER II

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

IF YOU'RE WONDERING what happened to Poker I, it's actually The World Of Card Games (you'll see it later in the book). Like its predecessor, Poker II is a 4 in 1 cartridge containing four different card games, all of which are relatively easy to learn. Max 2 is a 'get rid of your cards' type game where players are given 13 cards and can place down either single cards, pairs or five-card straights. Ghostbuster is similar except you can only put down pairs, and they're all put down automatically. In 99, you have to place cards on the table to increase a counter, with the aim being to be the one who gets it to 99. Finally, there's Change Around, where players take turns placing cards of the same suit. ■

FACT

The manual promises what's on offer here: 'If you are a man who loves the card games, you may enjoy yourself in them.'

POKER III: 5-IN-1

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

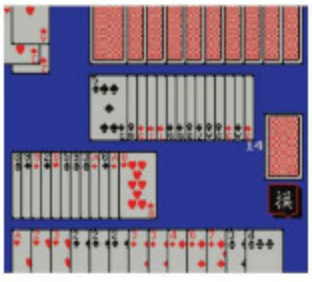
SACHEN RETURNS WITH another compilation of card games, but at least time there are some actual poker variations in there. Four of the games here are relatively basic: Poker, King Poker (similar, but with nudity), Blackjack and The 13 Cards (also known as Chinese Poker). The main event here though is the fifth game, King of Casino. This is basically a story mode which brings the other four games together: you make your way through a Las Vegas casnio, meeting people and playing the other games against them. It also mixes things up with shooting galleries and 'higher or lower' mini-games. And, naturally, there are women in the casino who will take their clothes off if you beat them, because, Sachen. ■

FACT

King of Casino opens with the mayor welcoming you to the casino, and advising you that 'perhaps there is a few frauds among this party'.

POKER MAHJONG

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen



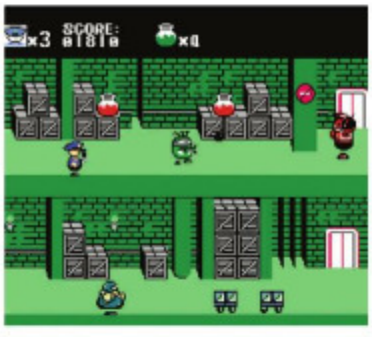
WHEN YOU CONSIDER the sizeable number of poker and mahjong games Sachen released for the NES, it could be argued that Poker Mahjong is the culmination of the publisher's work. It's a mahjong game where the traditional mahjong tiles have been replaced by standard playing cards. This actually makes it a decent way for westerners to learn how to play mahjong, because it's much easier to make Pong, Kong and Chow matches when you're using the more familiar card suits instead of the more complex tiles (especially since the NES's low resolution means the tiles in some other mahjong games are difficult to see). Naturally, being peak Sachen, there's also a tournament mode where the aim is to get a series of female opponents naked. ■

FACT

If you pause the game and press Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A you'll be able to select any card, essentially giving you an easy win.

POLICEMAN

Year 1992
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer TXC Corp



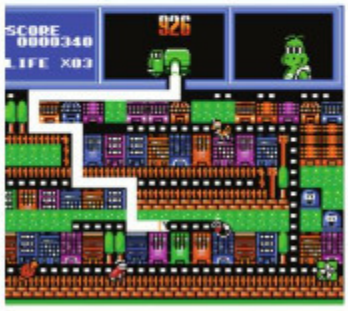
IN 1990, SEGA released Bonanza Bros. in the arcades (and later brought it to the Mega Drive). It was an action platformer where you played as Robo and Mobo, the titular brothers, as they broken into a variety of locations, stole their precious artifacts and escaped while shooting and avoiding the police. Interestingly, Policeman is a clear imitation of Bonanza Bros., but one that completely flips the idea on its head. This time you're playing as a police officer (the sprite looks very similar to the Bonanza Bros. enemy) and you're trying to get the artifacts back from the crime mob that stole them. As in Sega's game, you can use doors and other mechanisms to both hurt your enemies and protect yourself from bullets. ■

FACT

The game ends with you getting a medal in a ceremony in front of all your fellow police officers.

POPO TEAM

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen



IN THE YEAR 200X, the Earth has become strewn with garbage because people keep dumping it everywhere. Doctor Po Po is worried about the state of the planet, so he invents Chi Chi Po, an automated garbage collecting machine. Your role is to suck up all the garbage throughout 60 stages while avoiding the villains trying to damage Chi Chi Po. Popo Team is a sort of cross between Pac-Man and Snake: you extend a long tube with a mouth at the end and try to eat as many dots as you can, and then you press B to retract the tube back into the truck. You can eat enemies if you hit them head-on, but you'll lose a life if they hit the side of your tube. ■

FACT

The six environments in the game are City, Forest, Desert, Ocean, Industrial Complex and the brilliantly named Spiritual Wanderland.

THE P'RADIKUS CONFLICT

Year 1990
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams

A LONG TIME ago, a peaceful race called the Lextorians landed on the planet P'radikus and discovered it was at war. The P'radikans killed the Lextorians and, after figuring out how to use their advanced starship, began spreading its war throughout the galaxy. It's up to you to head out in your own starship, attack the P'radikans' various outposts and destroy P'radikus itself before the war reaches your home planet. Your ship has a central computer which tells you your next mission: there are eight in total, and mostly involve upgrading your ship, collecting various items or destroying enemy bases. The main combat sections control similarly to Asteroids, as you use thrust and rotation to move around while shooting. ■

FACT

If you pause and press B, Up, Right, A, Down, Left you'll get a more powerful weapon, which is useful in early missions.

PUZZLE

Year 1990
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Idea-Tek

IT'S HARD TO think of a more generic name for a game, although it's certainly accurate. Puzzle consists of ten sliding puzzles, but there are a few additions put in place to make it less frustrating than normal sliding puzzles. Firstly, there are a couple of blank slots at the side of the screen: these can be used to help you shuffle tiles around and make things a little easier. Secondly, at any time you can press the B button and sacrifice 60 seconds to bring up a game of rock, paper scissors. Win this game and you'll get to swap any two tiles on the board. Images range from a tiger and a castle to Mount Rushmore and a San Francisco streetcar. ■

FACT

Beat the game's eight puzzles and you'll get two expert puzzles to solve – the Golden Gate Bridge and Yosemite Valley – which only have one blank slot.

PYRAMID

Year 1990
Publisher AVE / Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

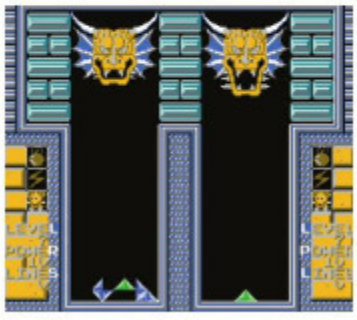
THERE HAVE BEEN countless Tetris clones over the years, but Pyramid at least tries something a little different with the concept. Instead of the usual four-block shapes used in Tetris, Pyramid uses five unique shapes made up of squares and triangles. The aim is still to clear lines, but the addition of these angled shapes add a new level of strategy to proceedings. In case you needed a plot for this, the manual has you covered: an archaeologist called Dr Otto Spetalbonky has uncovered the tomb of Queen Lera-Di'-ty, the 'mysterious Queen of fun'. Apparently she was among the first Egyptians to invent the concept of games, so that explains why you need to dump lots of stones on her tomb. Probably. ■

FACT

The manual's usual 'Precautions' section (telling you not to get the cartridge wet or exposed to extreme temperatures) has diagrams showing an Anubis-like character acting out what not to do.

PYRAMID II

Year 1990
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen



FOR THE MOST part Pyramid II looks and plays like its predecessor, but there have been a couple of changes made. The plot's new, for starters: this time you've travelled to South America, where an old fable claims that you can get magical power if you can 'find the way to resolve the problem of the triangle'. This is almost as hokey as the first game's story, but it does actually come into play this time: as you drop your various blocks and clear lines, you'll earn 'power' points. These can then be spent on special power-ups: a bomb which destroys a small area of blocks, a thunderbolt which destroys an entire column, or a mouse that runs across the playing area eating up all the triangle shapes. ■

FACT

'Do your best and concentrate for this game,' the manual advises. 'We believe that the magical power will belong to you.'

Q-BOY

Year 1994
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

AN INTERESTING PLATFORM game that has more than a hint of Kirby to it but also introduces a unique idea of its own. Q-Boy is a Kirby-like blob wearing a Santa hat who lives in the peaceful Q-Galaxy. The Rainbow Flower, which keeps the world happy, has been stolen by the evil Dr Mouse so you have to head off through five worlds to find him and get it back. The main feature in this game is a power meter, which acts like your stamina. It's three bars long: every time you double-jump you lose a bar, and every time you attack you lose half a bar. If your power runs out, Q-Boy has to stop and catch his breath before he can continue. ■

FACT

In a bold move, pausing the game and pressing Select replaces Q-Boy with Mario. Yes, really.

QUATTRO ADVENTURE

Year 1991
Publisher Camerica / Codemasters
Developer Codemasters

THE QUATTRO SERIES were a set of multi-game cartridges from Codemasters containing four games of a similar theme. Unlike many other multi-game carts, the games included in the Quattro series were of a relatively high quality and would arguably have sold well enough as standalone full-price releases. The theme in Quattro Adventure, unsurprisingly, is adventure games. The first, Boomerang Kid, is a slightly questionable platformer in which a young boy is lost by his parents during a camping trip in the Australian outback. He's raised by Aboriginees and taught survival techniques, so when their boomerang shop is ransacked by thieves (told you it was questionable) he heads out to get them back. Game two is Super Robin Hood, another platform adventure. This time, as Mr Hood himself, you have to make your way through the Sheriff of Nottingham's tower to find and rescue Maid Marian, who the Sheriff has kidnapped to punish Robin for his pesky do-gooding. The third game is Treasure Island Dizzy, which was originally released on home computers in 1988 and is the second game in the Dizzy series. Like most of the other Dizzy adventures, it's about collecting objects and using them to solve puzzles: this time you're doing it to get off a desert island and make your way back to your homeland. Finally, there's Linus Spacehead, the predecessor to Cosmic Spacehead. Linus crashes his brand new spacecar on planet Earth, so he's got to collect all the pieces of his radio to send an SOS signal and get back to his home planet. ■

FACT

Quattro Adventure was initially released on the Commodore 64, but Super Robin Hood was the only game that stayed for the NES port. The rest of the original line-up was Vampire, Ghost Hunters and the original Dizzy.

QUATTRO ARCADE

Year 1992
Publisher Camerica
Developer Codemasters

ANOTHER QUARTET OF decent quality Codemasters offerings, this time based on more arcade-like gameplay styles. First up is F-16 Renegade, a vertical-scrolling shoot 'em up with a needlessly complicated storyline. Instead of just saying 'you're in the air force, shoot down the bad guys', F-16 Renegade puts you in the shoes of a student called Todd Freeman whose head teacher Professor Helix is trying to start the Third World War by hacking into America's Air Force and scrambling its jets. After breaking into the Air Force(!) and stealing an F-16, you have to shoot down all the other US planes, which are being remotely controlled by your teacher.

After that madness is CJ's Elephant Antics, a platform game starring a cute elephant armed with a load of bombs. After being kidnapped by a circus, CJ falls out of his cage and escapes from the plane, floating out with his trusty umbrella. He lands in Paris and has to make his way back to the jungle.

Then there's Go! Dizzy Go!, a spin-off from the Dizzy series which plays less like the main games and more like Pac-Man. Dizzy (and his friend Denzil in two-player mode) has to collect all the fruits in the evil wizard Zaks' maze to rescue his fellow Yolkfolk.

Rounding things up is Stunt Buggies, another maze game (similar to Namco's Rally-X) in which you drive a buggy around, trying to collect a certain number of bombs while dropping smoke behind you to confuse enemy cars. ■

FACT

A prototype of Quattro Arcade 2 is said to exist, which included Kwik Snax (another Dizzy maze game) among others. It was never released.

QUATTRO SPORTS

Year 1991
Publisher Camerica / Codemasters
Developer Codemasters

THIS OTHER QUATTRO game caters more to the sports fan, offering four games based on baseball, football, tennis and BMX racing. The first of the games here is Baseball Pros, a fairly straightforward baseball game (albeit one with 10 innings rather than 9). Rather than official MLB teams, the teams here have more of a continental flavour to them: as well as American outfits like the New York Knockouts and Boston Graduates, there are some blatantly stereotypical squads from around the world like the London Royals, Mexico City Sombreros and Sydney Boomerangs.

Second is BMX Simulator, a top-down racing game with 15 different tracks set over three different course types. Dirt Biking is for beginners and includes gentle hills and turns, Desert Riding adds some more banked turns and jumps, while Quarry Racing is a seven-track beast with sharp bends and steep hills.

The third game is Soccer Simulator, a top-down football game with eight national teams (Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Holland, Russia, USA and West Germany) and the option to play either a friendly or a knockout tournament.

Last but not least is Pro Tennis, where you take on a series of eight CPU-controlled players in an attempt to win the championship.

Although the other two Quattro titles offer a foursome of games that are of an acceptable standard for their era, Quattro Sports is perhaps different in that only one of its games (Baseball Pros) looks good enough to belong on the NES in the early '90s. ■

FACT

Other clichéd team names in Baseball Pros include the Berlin Brewers, the Hawaiian Volcanoes and the Paris Concordes.

RACERMATE CHALLENGE II

Year 1996
Publisher RacerMate
Developer RacerMate

EASILY THE MOST elaborate NES game, RacerMate Challenge II was only available through mail order and came as part of the RacerMate CompuTrainer, a system designed to help cyclists train for marathons and long-distance races. It came with a large stand which you had to balance your real bike on, a 'load generator' which you sat your wheel on, a variety of cables and a modified NES designed to load the cartridge (as well as normal NES games). As you pedal your real bike, the wheel spins the load generator which in turn feeds information to the game, telling it how fast you're going. In this way you can take part in endurance races without ever having to leave the 'comfort' of your oddly elevated bike. ■

FACT

The whole CompuTrainer package can be found for around $500 in today's market, which isn't terrible considering it was reasonably expensive in the first place.

RAD RACKET: DELUXE TENNIS II

Year 1991
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Idea-Tek

IT'S NOT CLEAR whether there was ever a Deluxe Tennis in the first place, but nevertheless Rad Racket seems to think it's the sequel. There are six tennis pros to choose from here, each with different strengths and weaknesses: John Macaroni (who's nothing to do with John McEnroe, honest), Mark Chang, Lisa Starr, Fred Hoot, Libra Garcia and Omar Strato. Three courts are on offer: a grass court in San Jose, California, a clay court in Flagstaff, Arizona, and a hard court in Las Vegas. The oddest feature is the addition of Ross the Rad Racket Rodent, a small mouse who occasionally runs across the court. If you manage to hit him with your ball you'll automatically win the round. ■

FACT

Fred Hoot is the player with the most checkered past: according to the manual his overhead smash is so wild it's previously injured spectators.

RAID 2020

Year 1989
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams

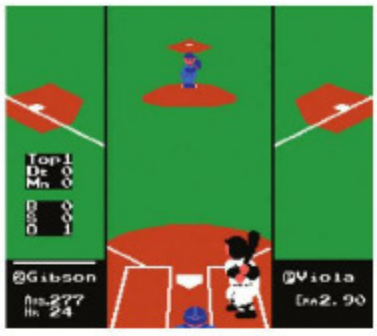
ACCORDING TO COLOR Dreams, the year 2020 will be 'a futuristic world gone wrong' where drugs are rife. You are Agent Shadow, the last of the elite officers from the undercover narcotics division: as the last resort in the battle against drugs, it's up to you to kill the drug kingpin Pit Bull and his minions. The game consists of side-on sections where you run around shooting your gun at enemies and flying around in your jetpack, and top-down sections where you jump in your speedboat to take out smugglers. Eventually things kick up a gear and you end up in space, where you face off against robots in a city called Technopolis before facing off against Pit Bill, who it turns out is a reptilian alien. ■

FACT

Beat the game to be told that 'your success will carry us into a new height in our fight against drugs. Remember, winners need no drugs.'

R.B.I. BASEBALL

Year 1988
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen



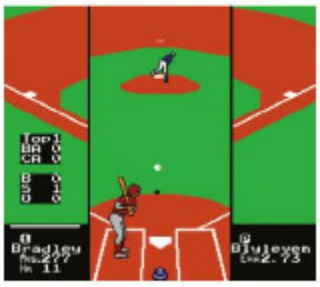
YOU'VE ALREADY SEEN Gauntlet and Pac-Man, so here's the last of the three Tengen games to get a licensed release before the publisher cracked Nintendo's code and went rogue. Like the other two examples, the unlicensed version of R.B.I. Baseball is absolutely identical to its licensed sibling, with the only major changes being the lack of Nintendo's snazzy seal of approval on the cover and the change from Nintendo's grey cartridge to Tengen's own black plastic design. Other than that, it's the same eight teams, the same two all-star teams and the same game in general. Both versions of R.B.I. are relatively common to find: the licensed grey carts are rarer than the unlicensed ones, but not by much. ■

FACT

R.B.I. Baseball was originally released on the Famicom by Namco under the name Pro Yakyuu: Family Stadium.

R.B.I. BASEBALL 2

Year 1990
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen



WHILE THE FIRST R.B.I. Baseball was based on Namco's Pro Yakuu game, Tengen decided to ditch its Japanese ties for the sequel and gave the game a completely new look. Gone are the chunky cartoon players, and replacing them are more realistically proportioned batters, pitchers and fielders. Out goes the cheery cartoon music, in comes more a more serious soundtrack. There are far more teams this time too: whereas the first game included 10 teams, there are now 28 here, and the addition of the MLBPA means all the player names are correct so you can now play as the likes of Cal Ripken Jr, Wade Boggs and Bo Jackson. Players generally agreed that R.B.I. 2 was a big leap forward. ■

FACT

An arcade version of R.B.I. called VS R.B.I. Baseball was released for Nintendo's VS System. Instead of modern teams, it featured ten all-time teams, with the likes of Babe Ruth and Willie Mays included.

R.B.I. BASEBALL 3

Year 1991
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

AFTER R.B.I. BASEBALL 2 offered such a huge change over its predecessor, players were forgiven for being initially disappointed that the third game looked and played identical to the second. While this is very much the case and the only major change made is to the game's rosters, this change is actually more interesting than it initially seems. The main 28-team roster has been updated to bring it in line with the new season, but the big change is that there are now 28 legacy teams, representing the Division Champions from 1983 to 1989. This let players play fantasy matches pitting, for example, the Toronto '89 team against San Diego '84, or Los Angeles '88 against Kansas City '85. ■

FACT

All three R.B.I. games have hidden staff credits on the title screen. If you press A, B and Start together you'll get a 'Coaching Staff' screen that lists the developers.

ROAD RUNNER

Year 1989
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

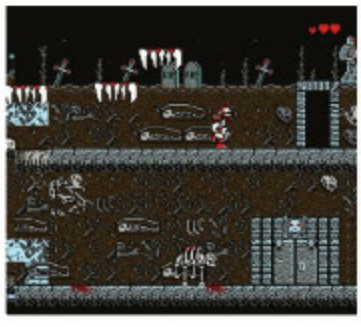
ORIGINALLY RELEASED AS an arcade game in 1985, Road Runner was ported by Tengen to the NES four years later. You play as the iconic Looney Tunes bird as you try to evade the clutches of Wile E. Coyote, who keeps chasing after you. The aim is to beat each stage by running to the left and eating any birdseed you find. You have a speed meter, which is split into five sections: if you miss any bird seed you lose a section. If the meter empties completely, Road Runner will become exhausted and Wile E. Coyote will catch him. Given that it's based on the cartoon, Wile E. also has a series of gadgets to try and catch you with: sometimes he'll appear on a pogo stick, roller skates or a rocket. ■

FACT

The game's soundtrack consists almost entirely of classical music, from the Nutcracker Suite to the William Tell Overture.

ROBODEMONS

Year 1990
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams



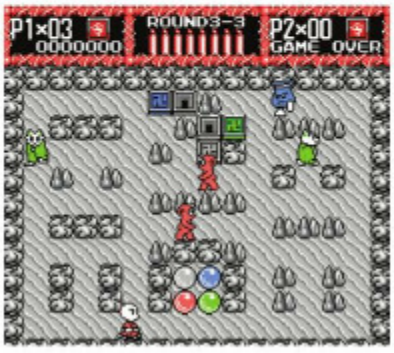
THE EVIL DEMON King Kull is a real sod: he's created a special machine that can take the souls of demons and put them in the bodies of machines (a bit like a nastier take on Robocop). His army of Robodemons is taking over the Earth so it's up to you, a nameless 'most great warrior', to give Kull a smack. You're armed with your magical boomerang (naturally) and have booster rockets on your back which occasionally let you fly in side-scrolling shoot 'em up sections. As you make your way through the game's seven stages you also have to find and free the condemned souls of your ancestors. Some of the stages have unintentionally hilarious names: the graveyard is called the 'Level of Bone'. ■

FACT

Robodemons has some sampled speech: the title screen has a muffled voice saying 'Robodemons', while dying causes your character to let out a brilliantly half-hearted 'argh'.

ROCKBALL

Year 1993
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen



BACK IN THE day, the God of Heaven captured the four Evils of Hell and trapped each of them in a magic ball. Over time the balls have become loose, so playing as Pan-zo (and his pal Pan-lo in multiplayer) you have to capture them again. This is a puzzle game where each stage contains a number of coloured balls and podiums. You have to roll the balls around and get them onto their respective podiums to clear the stage and move onto the next. There are numerous enemies roaming each level: you can either take them out by rolling balls into them, or you can launch an incantation at them to stun them for a few seconds, letting you get out of tight spots. ■

FACT

There are five stages in total: Fantasy Forest, Desert Ravine, Black Wind Hole, Ghost Island and Devil Tower.

ROLLING THUNDER

Year 1989
Publisher Tengen
Developer Namco / Tengen

ROLLING THUNDER WAS an arcade game created by Namco in 1986 which was then ported to the NES a few years later. It's a run-and-gun platform game where you play as Albatross, the best agent for the international secret police organisation Rolling Thunder, as he tries to rescue his fellow agent Leila from the alien terrorist who's kidnapped her. Rolling Thunder is best known for its oddly tall character sprites, which initially look strange but actually make for more satisfying shoot-outs with enemies as the extra height makes ducking behind crates for cover feel even more crucial. Another key element is entering doors to hide from enemies, sometimes to top up your ammo or gain a temporary machine gun. ■

FACT

The original arcade version of Rolling Thunder can be found on Namco Museum for the Nintendo Switch.

SEA OF DREAMLAND

Year 1992
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer Mega Soft

KNOWN IN BRAZIL as La Gran Aventure Submarina, Sea of Dreamland is a side-scrolling shoot 'em up where you play as a seahorse swimming through a series of underwater caverns. An evil three-headed dragon thing called Silas has captured the Tear of Vera, which is the symbol of hope that keeps Dreamland happy (Dreamland being an underwater world, not the place where Kirby lives). It's up to a seahorse called Abby to track down Silas and get the Tear of Vera back. As well as being able to shoot bullets (and upgrade these bullets with a variety of power-ups), you can press the A button to make Abby perform a downwards thrust and kill enemies underneath her with her tail. ■

FACT

Other bosses in the game include a shoal of killer angelfish, a giant blowfish and a large shark. If you're quick, the latter can be killed before it even starts to attack.

SECRET SCOUT IN THE TEMPLE OF DEMISE

Year 1991
Publisher Color Dreams
Developer Color Dreams

WHILE OUT ON a camping trip with your fellow scouts, you're separated from them 'by unexplainable events'. When what you think is a rescue group shows up, it turns out it's actually a team of henchmen working for the evil Dr Demise, who has nondescript yet doubtless nefarious plans for the forest. You have to search an ancient temple where Dr Demise and his henchmen have set up their base, and put an end to their dirty deeds. This is an awkwardly controlled action platformer which occasionally throws some puzzles into the mix. Some of the slightly controversial enemies you face include a 'Crazy Native', the 'Dodo Dwarfs' and a sneaky French acrobat called Pierre le Pounce. They don't make them like they used to. ■

FACT

In some areas there's a large orange ring of energy that follows you. If it catches you it freezes you in place for a while. According to the manual, it's got the rather apt name of 'Holdy Ring'.

SHINOBI

Year 1989
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF Tengen porting some of Sega's arcade games to the NES. Shinobi has you playing as 'Master Ninja' (named Joe Musashi in other versions, but not here) as he fights the terrorist organisation the Ring of Five in an attempt to rescue the kidnapped children of the world's leaders. While Shinobi was originally released in arcades, the NES port is instead based on the Sega Master System version. It isn't identical to it, though: all the close-range weapons from the Master System version have been removed, meaning instead of swords, chains and nunchaku you're stick with your feet and fists here. It's still an effective action game despite this, even though some of the boss fights are frustrating. ■

FACT

Joe Musashi is a playable character in the Sega racing game Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed, where he races in a quad bike and throws fireballs at opponents.

SHOCKWAVE

Year 1990
Publisher American Game Cartridges
Developer American Game Cartridges

SHOCKWAVE IS A strange puzzle game from American Game Cartridges (who also published Chiller and Death Race, although this one's nowhere near as controversial). Set across 50 increasingly challenging levels, you have to collect a series of crystals in each stage in order to progress to the next. Most of the crystals lie behind series of blocks, but luckily you're armed with a gun to blast them away… sort of. You see, the gimmick here is that your gun is actually a shock wave pistol, which means when you shoot a block it doesn't blow up: instead, all the other blocks next to it are blown sideways with the shockwave. It's a unique gimmick and one that takes a little getting used to, but it's clever. ■

FACT

American Game Cartridges sold its games cheaper than most, and went bankrupt after three titles as a result. Its VP of product development, Richard Frick, then set up American Video Entertainment, which did a little better.

SILENT ASSAULT

Year 1990
Publisher Color Dreams / Sachen
Developer Joy Van

AN EVIL ALIEN power (with turns out to be a pair of massive sphinxes) has taken over Earth's military forces, rendering the planet defenceless. For some reason that's never actually explained, you happen to be the only person on the planet that the alien demon creatures can't possess, so you're the one who has to track down the source of the power and destroy it. Silent Assault is a run-and-gun game which borrows a few elements from Contra (most notably the lying down position when you duck). Enemies start off straightforward enough, with guards and drones attacking you, but you eventually face off against mummies, 'death skulls', killer hawks and a weird lizard called a 'gaka monster'. ■

FACT

The game ends bizarrely, by showing you a room with three portraits of a bearded man on the wall before dumping you back on the title screen.

SILVER EAGLE

Year 1994
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

IN THE YEAR 199X (Sachen didn't give itself much room for leeway there), the nefarious Dacok Bloc sets up a military post in the South Pacific Ocean and starts selling hi-tech military weapons to political dissidents in the Third World. Outraged, the Security Council sends in Bill, a top pilot flying their new 'invisible' plane (which is perfectly visible), to save the day. There are two styles of play here: Metal Gear style adventure sections where you explore each stage, followed by shoot 'em up sections after you find your completely visible aircraft. There are only four stages, but they're lengthy: reaching the final Transformers-like giant mech boss and beating the game without dying can take around 45 minutes, which is a lot for games of its era. ■

FACT

Everyone likes a typo, and there's one here. The fourth mission is called 'Destoyr Command Post'.

SKATE BOY

Year 1992
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer Mega Soft

IF THE SKATE or Die games or 720 don't fulfil your desire for a good skateboarding game on the NES (and let's face it, we already know Back to the Future won't) then Skate Boy may scratch that itch instead. Set across five different stages – a city street, a forest road, a beach boardwalk, a highway and a dangerous alleyway – you have to skate to the end of each of them before the time limit runs out. Naturally, hitting enemies and falling off your skateboard will waste valuable seconds, but you can at least defend yourself by throwing what appears to be little Frisbees at anything that gets in your way. Not an exceptional game, but certainly not terrible either. ■

FACT

Gluk's games didn't really start entering the collector's market until the mid 2000s when it became clearer among international collectors that its games weren't pirate bootlegs of licensed games, but legit games released without the Nintendo licence.

SKULL & CROSSBONES

Year 1990
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

THE ORIGINAL ARCADE version of Skull & Crossbones was released by Atari in 1987 and was a beat 'em up game similar to Double Dragon with the gimmick being that you were a pirate, meaning instead of kneeing thugs in the face you were engaging in sword fights instead. This NES adaptation is more or less a completely different game, instead offering a side-scrolling platform game where shooting enemies with your pistol is more commonplace than close quarters combat. You play as One Eye, a pirate trying to find the Evil Wizard who appeared on your ship and kidnapped the princess you were supposed to be protecting. There's also a split-screen co-op mode where a second player can join you as the crimson-pantalooned Red Dog. ■

FACT

Beat the wizard and rescue the princess and the game ends with a dance party aboard your ship, because apparently those existed back then.

SOLITAIRE

Year 1992
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Odyssey Software

'IF YOU HAVE never played before,' the Solitaire box blurb assures you, 'you'll soon understand just how much fun a deck of cards can be'. To be fair, this was 1992: we were still a couple of years away from Solitaire's true revival when Windows 95 appeared and ensured it became the most common method of time-wasting at workplaces the world over. Given its relative infancy in the world of solitaire gaming, then, AVE's version is pretty basic: you can play with either a one-card or three-card draw, and can choose between five different colours for the card backs. It may not be all-singing and all-dancing but it's a perfectly competent version of Solitaire and remains playable to this day. ■

FACT

The back of the box sets the scene: 'You are alone on a beautiful tropical beach, palm trees sway in the warm summer breeze, the songs of a thousand exotic birds fill the air.' Naturally, none of this is in the game.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Year 1992
Publisher Wisdom Tree
Developer Wisdom Tree

OF ALL THE Christian-themed games released under Color Dreams' Wisdom Tree label, Spiritual Warfare is perhaps the farthest stretch. It's a Legend of Zelda imitation in which your aim is to 'meet the enemies of the Lord' and collect the six pieces of the Armor of God before literally facing off against Satan. Each of these six pieces gives you new abilities: the Shield of Faith halves the amount of damage you take, as does the brilliantly named Breastplate of Righteousness. The Helmet of Salvation protects you from explosions, the Sword of the Spirit explodes when you throw it, the Belt of Truth lets you push obstacles, and you can walk over uneven surfaces if you're wearing the Boots of the Gospel. ■

FACT

Some boss battles need you to use an item called 'Samson's jawbone'. It's from *Judges* 15:16, where Samson says: 'With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men.'

STRATEGIST

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen

DESPITE HAVING ONE of the most boring titles in the NES library, Strategist actually contains a relatively charming pair of card games. The first is Poker Racing, which doesn't actually have anything to do with poker: you and an opponent are in cars, and the aim is to get the farthest by placing cards. Green ones move you forward a certain distance, red ones hinder your opponent, blue ones negate the effects of red ones and purple ones automatically protect you. The second game is The Battle of Poker, which is the same sort of thing but with tanks: the only major differences are that you need to play an extra card before you can move, and attacks on your opponents are now things like airstrikes instead of burst tyres. ■

FACT

The distance cards in Poker Racing take you forward 40, 60, 90, 100 or 120 km (25, 37, 56, 62 or 75 miles) whereas in The Battle of Poker they only take you 1–5 km (0.6–3.1 miles) so it's clear which is the more high-speed chase.

STREET HEROES

Year 1994
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

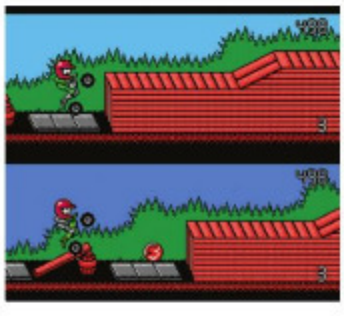
SACHEN MAY HAVE had a reputation for delivering poor quality games, but Street Heroes – one of its final releases – does some genuinely impressive things with the NES hardware. It's a blatant Street Fighter knock-off (right down to the title logo using the same font) with eight playable characters, all of whom seem to be based on different types of historical warrior. These include a Knight Templar called Roger, a viking called Big Whale and an Egyptian claw fighter called Rock Tiger. There's a surprising amount of sampled (albeit muffled) speech in Street Heroes, and given the limitations of the NES and some iffy controls it actually manages to deliver a fighting game that isn't a clunky mess. ■

FACT

The final boss is Dark Moon, an evil priest who's armed with a scythe. Defeat him and he'll use the last of his power to conjure up a clone of you, making the last fight a mirror match.

STUNT KIDS

Year 1992
Publisher Camerica
Developer Codemasters



THIS MOTOCROSS GAME by Codemasters was perhaps ahead of its time in some ways. It's a sort of one-on-one racing platformer where you race against either a CPU opponent or a friend as you try to finish the stage before they do. Along the way you'll need to jump over certain obstacles and use a turbo boost to clear larger gaps. There are some very basic physics-based mechanics at play here: you can use Up and Down on the D-pad to raise or lower your front wheel and shift your balance, meaning the most modern equivalent is the popular Trials series of games by RedLynx and Ubisoft. There are 30 stages in total, as well as a handful of bonus stages filled with fruit and coins. ■

FACT

Stunt Kids was one of the games planned to be released as a mini-cartridge for Camerica and Codemasters' Aladdin Deck Enhancer, but it only made it as a full-size cart.

SUNDAY FUNDAY: THE RIDE

Year 1995
Publisher Wisdom Tree
Developer Wisdom Tree

MENACE BEACH WAS one of Color Dreams' most popular games, but the idea of trying to rescue a sarcastic girlfriend whose clothes rot off after every stage wasn't exactly the most Christian concept. To deal with this, Color Dreams released a modified version of Menace Beach called Sunday Funday, in which you play as a skateboard-riding child trying to get to Sunday School on time. This time the enemies aren't trying to kill you, they're trying to tempt you away from God. when you 'defeat' them by throwing a newspaper at them to distract them, a dove appears so you're 'reminded that your strength comes from God'. Instead of your half-naked girlfriend, your fully clothed Sunday School teacher turns up between stages to give encouragement. ■

FACT

The cartridge also includes a puzzle game called Fish Fall, and a singalong version of a song called The Ride, by Christian pop band 4Him.

SUPER PANG

Year 1991
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

SACHEN WANTED TO bring a version of Pang – known as Buster Bros. in the US – to the NES, so instead of making something similar then giving it a different name to avoid any potential confusion (much like Gluk Video did with Balloon Monster) it just flat out released a game with Pang in the title. Like the game it's based on, Super Pang is about firing a harpoon gun to shoot bubbles and burst them into smaller bubbles, then repeating this until the stage is clear. You can collect power-ups too: the grappling hook sticks your rope to the ceiling until a bubble bounces into it and bursts, while the dynamite blows up every single bubble until they're all the smallest size (which can be dangerous). ■

FACT

There are 15 stages in Sachen's Super Pang on the NES. In Capcom's Super Pang on the SNES, there are 40 stages.

SUPER PANG II

Year 1992
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

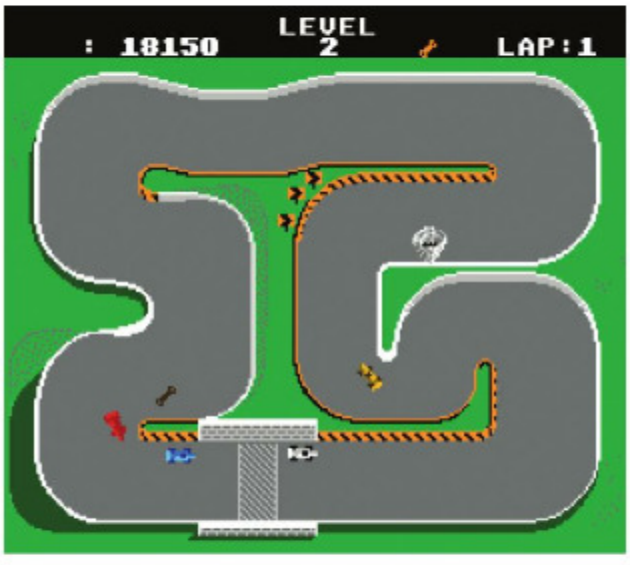
JUST TO MAKE sure it really drove the point home, Sachen made a sequel to Super Pang which again kept the Pang name. Danny and David, the protagonists from the first game, return to fire a load more harpoons at another bunch of balloons. The sequel is pretty much the same sort of thing over a new batch of levels, with backgrounds including the Great Wall of China, the Arc de Triomphe, Sydney Opera House, the Leaning Tower of Pisa and some windmills in the Netherlands. It's a slightly longer game than its predecessor: whereas the first game offered 15 stages to play through, Super Pang II ups this number to 20. This aside, it's bubble-bursting business as usual. ■

FACT

Nothing has ever summed up Pang better than the badly-written Super Pang II manual, which declares: 'This game is inviting you dance with the evil balloons.'

SUPER SPRINT

Year 1989
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen



ATARI'S SUPER SPRINT and its sequel Championship Sprint both hit American arcades in 1986. Although they weren't the first of their kind – Atari had released the more primitive Gran Trak 10 and Sprint 2 in 1974 and 1976 respectively – they were far more popular among '80s arcade-goers and as such it went without saying that Atari would eventually release an NES version under its Tengen label. Like its ancestors before it, Super Sprint is a top-down racing game where the entire track is on the screen, making it easier to see how all your opponents are doing. The aim, naturally, is to finish first in each race and get as far as possible: although there are only seven courses, they continue on an endless loop each time you beat them, adding more obstacles each time (win track 7 and up next is track 1 again). If you win a race after collecting two wrenches lying on the track, you get to improve your car's grip, top speed or acceleration. Once your car is maxed out you can choose to increase your score instead. Despite its simplicity, Super Sprint is the sort of game that rewards practice. Your car's handling is extremely twitchy and those new to the game will likely find their vehicle turning too sharply and smacking earnestly head-first into walls. It's only once you learn the exact time to start turning into each corner that you end up zipping around each track like a slot car racer. ■

FACT

The Midway Arcade pack for the recent toys-to-life game Lego Dimensions includes the arcade versions of both Super Sprint and Championship Sprint as unlockable games.

TAGIN' DRAGON

Year 1990
Publisher Bunch Games / Sachen
Developer Sachen

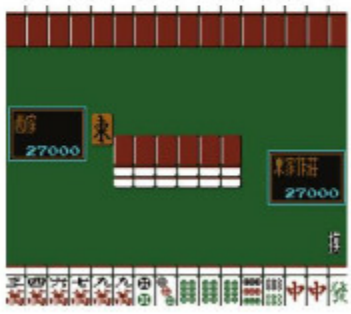
DON'T SPEND TOO long trying to figure out what the title means, and how it's even pronounced: it's a typo and should've been Taggin' Dragon. It's a maze combat game in a similar vein to Bomberman, but instead of dropping bombs to blow up your opponents you're trying to bite their tails instead (similar to a game of tag). One bite weakens them and lets you attack them from the front too, while the second bite kills them (unless they can bite another dragon and grow their tail back). As well as the main single-player mode, there's a co-op version where two of you try to kill CPU dragons, and a versus mode where it's friend versus friend and tail versus tail in a showdown for the ages. Or something. ■

FACT

Sachen later released Tagin' Dragons under the name Colorful Dragon, which isn't much better, really.

TAIWAN MAHJONG

Year 1989
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen



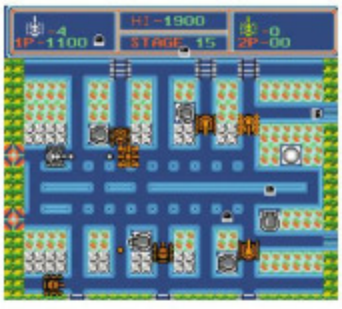
ALSO KNOWN AS 16 Mahjong in some regions, Taiwan Mahjong is a bare bones mahjong game where the only option is to play against the CPU (there's no two-player mode). There are two difficulties here, Beginner and Advanced. In Beginner mode, you can take as long as you like to make a move when it's your turn, and any time you select a tile you're shown if there are any melds that can be made with that tile: in a way this makes it a good mode for learning how mahjong works. In Advanced mode, you only get 10 seconds to make a move and you aren't told when you can make a meld: you're expected to know this stuff, this isn't amateur hour mahjong any more, pal. ■

FACT

Mahjong is so popular in the east that, to date, more than 150 mahjong games have been released for all the Nintendo systems combined.

TANK

Year 1992
Publisher Gluk Video
Developer Mega Soft



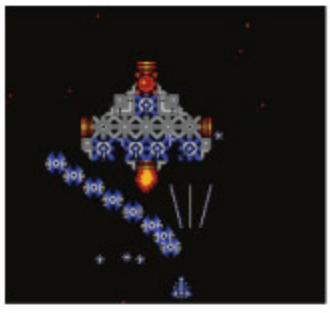
OR TANQUE, TO cite the name on the game box when Gluk Video released it in Spain. At its core it's a variation on the tank game genre made popular by Atari's Combat in 1977, where you're shown your tank in a top-down view and have to drive around blowing up the enemy tanks. 'No tank battle can be as fascinating as this one', however, according to Gluk Video's promotional spiel, which promises Tank 'is a luxury edition of the tank game'. In its defence, it does do a little more than most similar games before it: the environments in which you fight actually look like city streets, there are different types of enemy tank instead of just one, and you can increase your tank's power. ■

FACT

Although the tank genre is rarely represented these days it still has the occasional revival. A good example is the 100-mission tank game in Wii Play, which some consider a hidden gem.

TASAC

Year 1992
Publisher Sachen
Developer Thin Chen



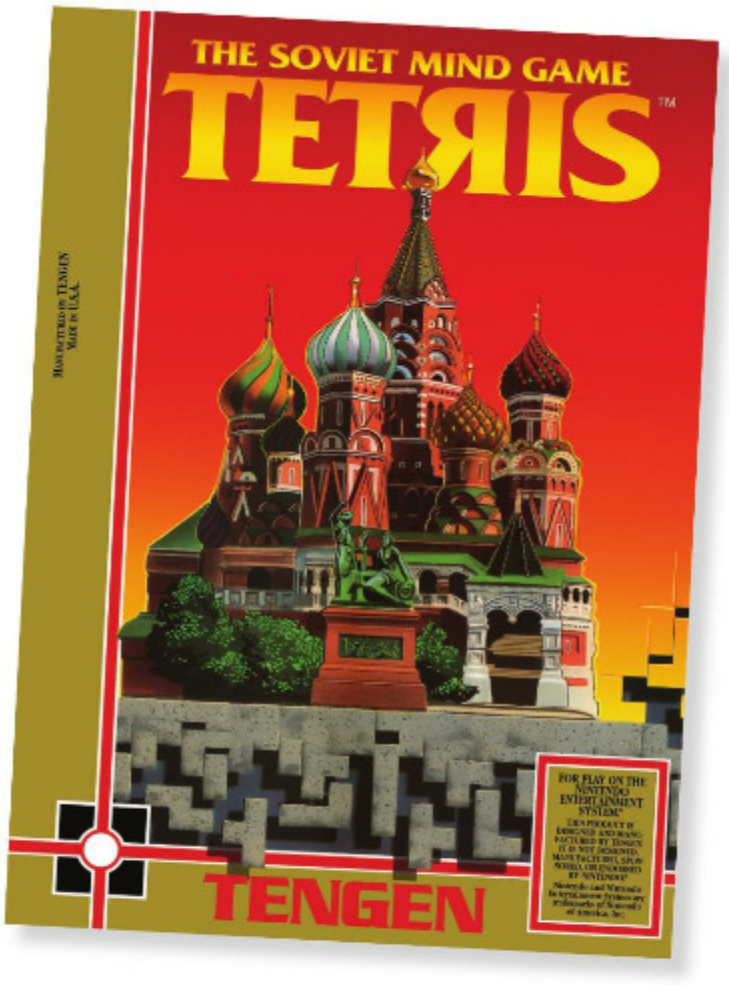
NOT TO BE confused with the licensed shoot 'em up Zanac, Tasac is an unlicensed one that's far inferior in quality. It's got a stock shoot 'em up storyline: in the year 2000, the human race is fighting with bionic mutant alien terrorists called Tasac. The commanders of Earth Defence Arms, the oddly named Landsy and Dagrel, head out to destroy Tasac and rescue the planet. There are 14 stages in total here, and other than the boss enemy and the types of enemies you'll come across, the levels themselves appear to be random instead of using set waves. There are three basic power-ups that make your lasers thicker, let you fire a five-way spread shot and let you fire multiple shots in a straight line. ■

FACT

Some of the bosses in Tasac almost fill the screen. If you're trapped at the top and can't get to the bottom to shoot at them, you can sometimes fly right to the top of the screen and your shots will appear from the bottom instead.

TETRIS

Year	1989
Publisher	Tengen
Developer	Tengen



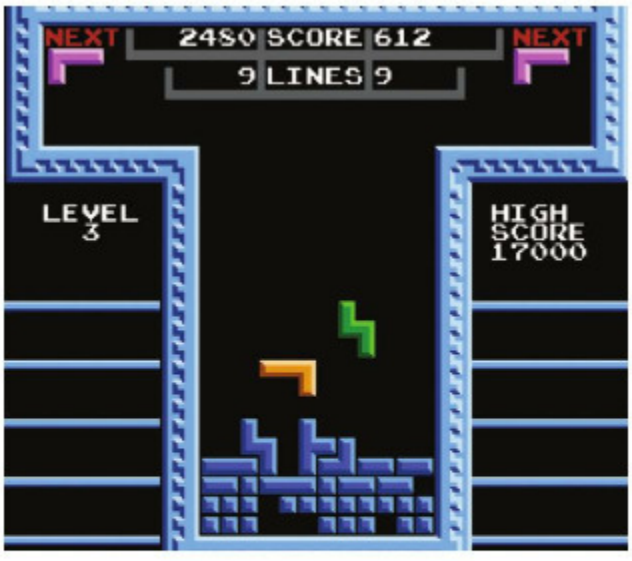
THE STORY OF the Tetris licence is so convoluted and comprises so many twists and turns that the BBC once broadcast an hour-long documentary about it. To cut a long story relatively short:, British publisher Andromeda claimed it had the rights to Tetris, even though it didn't: Tetris creator Alexey Pajitnov had merely said he was interested. It then did a 'deal' with UK studio Mirrorsoft for the right to make a version of Tetris for computers. With its computer-only 'deal', Mirrorsoft then signed up Atari to make a console version of Tetris for the NES (through its Tengen brand).

Meanwhile, Nintendo approached ELORG – the Soviet state-owned organisation that actually did own the rights to Tetris – and agreed a genuine deal for the rights to make Tetris on handhelds and consoles. Atari already had its Tengen version ready, so it decided to release it as an unlicensed cartridge anyway. A court case ensued, and Atari was ordered to recall and destroy the Tengen version of Tetris. It was pulled off the shelves, but wasn't destroyed, which is why despite having only officially been on sale for a short time it's still actually not that scarce these days.

Some Tetris fans believe it's a shame that Atari / Tengen had to recall its NES version of the game because, to their eyes, it's actually better than Nintendo's own official version. Some claim this is partly down to presentation: the Tengen version makes its Soviet influence clearer with a large Tetris logo, complete with Cyrillic backwards Я, on the screen at all times. The soundtrack has more of a Russian feel too: although the Nintendo version's main theme is a version of *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* by Russian composer Tchaikovsky, the Tengen version goes less in the direction of classical music and more towards Russian folk songs (similar to Nintendo's Game Boy version).

FACT

Although it isn't a Konami game, Tengen Tetris does include the Konami code: pause the game and enter it to replace your current block with the long 'I' shaped one. It can only be done once per game.



Others state the Tengen version is better because it simply has more gameplay modes available. As well as the standard 'endless' mode where you keep playing forever until your pile of blocks reaches the top of the screen, it also includes something many feel the Nintendo version is sorely lacking: a two-player mode. This extends to solo players too, with the option to play a versus game against the CPU also there.

More unique to the Tengen version is the fascinating co-op mode. This extends the width of the play area from 10 blocks to 12, and lets two players (or one player and a CPU partner) share the same grid, each dropping their own set of blocks at the same time. It can have a sizeable impact on the way the game's played, as instead of simply thinking ahead as you build towards a Tetris you have to make sure your partner's on the same page too and doesn't have a completely different strategy in mind.

It may not have been on the shelves for long, and it may not even have been allowed in the first place, but the Tengen version of Tetris is nevertheless an intriguing and entertaining take on the game. ■

THUNDER BLASTER MAN

Year 1995
Publisher Sachen
Developer Sachen

RELEASED ON THE Famicom as Rocman X and clearly featuring Mega Man – known as Rockman in Japan – on the packaging, Thunder Blaster Man received a name change for the NES in order to be fractionally more subtle (although the title screen is unaltered and still says Rocman X). Playing as the man himself, you have to rescue the Mayor's daughter from a group of mysterious strangers. Despite the obvious influences, Thunder Blaster Man actually plays less like Mega Man than many other legit NES games did: instead of a blaster you're armed with a boomerang and can charge up a flying punch attack. You also don't get the bosses' abilities once you defeat them like you do in Mega Man. ■

FACT

If you perform a charging attack and land in a bottomless pit, a glitch will trigger that lets you walk on all the pits in the stage.

TILES OF FATE

Year 1990
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer C&E

DON'T BE FOOLED by its dramatic title: Tiles of Fate is another take on the variation of mahjong solitaire in which you have to remove tiles by joining matching ones by no more than three straight lines (exactly like in Happy Pairs and Mahjong Trap). The difference is that this one has a few power-ups that you find underneath some tiles once they've been matched: these let you activate different abilities to make things easier. One forces a match that isn't otherwise possible, for example, while another shows you a possible match if you can't find any. There's a story here, too: the tiles are magical and their lack of symmetry leads to ancient China being ravaged by floods and famines, so you have to match them to bring calm. ■

FACT

There's a simultaneous two-player mode where both players work on the same grid, but have separate scores.

TOOBIN'

Year 1989
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

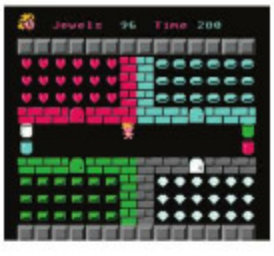
EASILY ONE OF the greatest innertube-based games ever made, Toobin' came to arcades in 1988 before Atari (under its Tengen name) brought it to the NES the following year. The aim is to ride your rubber ring down to the bottom of a number of stages, while passing through score gates and avoiding the numerous enemies and obstacles trying to literally burst your bubble. Most of the rivers you float down are based on real-world locations like the Nile, the Mississippi and the Rio Grande. Occasionally though you'll end up in a fantasy area, like one set in the Jurassic era, or one located in Hell (complete with skulls chasing you and arms coming out of the water with knives). ■

FACT

Toobin's instruction manual is written in painful Bill and Ted speak. One of the tips for playing is: 'Like, feel your way down those waves, dude'.

TROLLS ON TREASURE ISLAND

Year 1994
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Michael Crick



THIS GAME IS not to be confused with The Trolls in Crazyland, which was a platform game officially licensed to use the Dam Trolls which were all the rage in the '90s. Trolls on Treasure Island is instead an unlicensed puzzle game whose trolls all look exactly like Dam Trolls but aren't, honest. It's actually extremely similar to AVE's other game Dudes with Attitude, where your character runs back and forth automatically and the aim is to knock out all the items on the stage. As in Dudes with Attitude these items are all various colours and you have to match them by running over paint pots: whereas in that game it was based on the colour of the ball you were controlling, this time it's the colour of the troll's hair. ■

FACT

As well as the main single-player mode there's a co-op option where two players can take on each stage at the same, as well as an edit mode where you can create your own stages.

ULTIMATE LEAGUE SOCCER

Year 1991
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer C&E

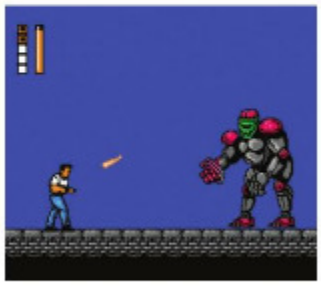
'DRIBBLING IS EXACTLY as it sounds: the ball moves like water dribbling between rocks in a stream bed.' So goes the manual for Ultimate League Soccer, a football game that was developed in America (unlike most others of its era, which came from Japan or Europe). There are eight international teams to choose from – France, UK, USA, Argentina, Italy, Brazil, Australia and Germany – and you can play either a single game or compete in the Gold Cup, with the aim being to beat every other other team placed in front of you in order to be rewarded with an image of a suspiciously Diego Maradona-esque player holding up the trophy. Not a terrible football game, even if it runs at a plodding pace. ■

FACT

Among the other gems from the manual (seemingly written by someone not familiar with football) is the claim that a football team is made up of three positions: fullbacks, forwards and linkmen.

THE ULTIMATE STUNTMAN

Year 1990
Publisher Camerica / Codemasters
Developer Codemasters



YOU ARE THE Ultimate Stuntman. That's apparently your actual name, because when people call your phone in cut-scenes, that's how they address you. The nefarious Doctor Evil (not the Austin Powers one) has kidnapped top scientist Jenny Akroyd, so you have to get her back. Each mission in The Ultimate Stuntman generally consists of a number of different sections: these include a racing stage where you have to get a car, boat, dune buggy or hang glider to the end without dying, a side-scrolling action platforming section where you're armed with a gun, a climbing section where you switch between climbing and using a cursor to snipe enemies around you, a side-scrolling shoot 'em up section in your glider and a bomb disposal puzzle section. ■

FACT

The game's music was composed by Gavin Raeburn, who's now the owner and CEO of Playground Games, developer of the Forza Horizon series.

VENICE BEACH VOLLEYBALL

Year 1991
Publisher American Video Entertainment
Developer Idea-Tek

THERE AREN'T MANY sports games that start off near the end of a tournament, but that's the case in Venice Beach Volleyball: after 'hundreds of two-men and two-women teams' have been competing in the Venice Beach Open, the game kicks off at the semi-final stage. Conveniently for the developers, this means there are now not hundreds, but only four teams to choose from: Venice Beach locals Bob and Howard, 'co-ed babes' Lisa and Bambi, Texan spike masters Steve and Jamile, and Kelly and Monica who are apparently 'a couple of the smartest, tannest cuties in town'. You can play against either the CPU or a friend, or you can buddy up with a partner and take on the CPU together. ■

FACT

After some plays, a crab called Sandy Claws will appear, take the ball and scuttle off the screen with it.

VINDICATORS

Year 1988
Publisher Tengen
Developer Tengen

IT'S THE YEAR 2525 and Earth is in peril (after having been in peril during all those other years in different NES games). An attacking force of evil alien space stations is set to destroy the planet, but not if you – and a partner, should you so choose – can put an end to them with your special Vindicator tanks. As you make your way upwards through each stage your fuel is constantly draining, so while destroying enemies you need to be sure to collect any fuel power-ups you find. You can also collect stars: these act as currency and help you upgrade your tank's speed, shot range, shot power and shield. The levels are specifically designed to have dead-ends, forcing you to backtrack and use up fuel. ■

FACT

A very rare sequel (more of an upgrade) to the arcade version of Vindicators made it to around 400 arcades. It can be played in Midway Arcade Origins on PS3 and Xbox 360.

WALLY BEAR AND THE NO! GANG

Year	1992
Publisher	American Video Entertainment
Developer	American Game Cartridges

WISDOM TREE DIDN'T have the monopoly on morally sound video games, you know. American Video Entertainment also dabbled with integrity when it released Wally Bear and the NO! Gang, a platformer developed in partnership with the American Medical Association and the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information.

Wally Bear is a hip and happening, sunglasses-wearing, skateboarding bear who's on his way to a party at his uncle Gary Grizzly's house. The problem is, his uncle lives on the other side of the city so Wally has to face the clearly daunting prospect of skating from one end of the city to the other without becoming a drug addict, alcoholic or heavy smoker by the time he gets there.

After each stage, Wally encounters another member of the NO! Gang, which leads to a cut-scene in which some sort of addiction is addressed (such as travelling through a subway train to stop your friend Toby the Turtle 'taking pills' to get in with the cool crowd).

It would appear the NO! Gang are also keen hardware modders too: Nintendo added protection to all its 'revision 11' NES consoles released after October 1990 that prevented unlicensed games from working, so the Wally Bear manual includes detailed instructions (under a page headed 'Just say no') on how to open up your NES and solder a jumper wire onto the circuit board to undo it. It even included an 'Upgrade Certification' form you could fill in and send to AVE for $10 off its next game. ■

FACT

The three 'bad influences' out to cause trouble for Wally are Ricky Rat, Larry Lizard and Willard Weasel. The latter is referred to as a 'fur faced freak', so apparently body-shaming is fine.

WAR IN THE GULF

Year	1991
Publisher	CCE / Gluk Video
Developer	Mega Soft

THIS SIDE-SCROLLING SHOOT 'em up set during the Persian Gulf War has you flying a helicopter called the Super AH-64 through five stages of enemies and bosses. It's fairly standard fare for the most part, but what's perhaps a little more unusual is the game's soundtrack, which seems to consist almost entirely of chiptune versions of rock songs. The title screen is Electric Eye by Judas Priest, one stage features the solo from ozzy Osbourne's Crazy Train, and fans of the Scorpions are in for a treat because there are at least three of their songs in here: Rock You Like a Hurricane, Still Loving You and Big City Nights. The game may be wholly unremarkable, but the music rip-offs make it at least notable. ■

FACT

War in the Gulf was released in Brazil by CCE, in Spain by Gluk Video and in France by Hyber Boy. It's difficult to find in any of these forms.

THE WORLD OF CARD GAMES

Year	1990
Publisher	Sachen
Developer	Sachen

IF YOU WONDERED why Sachen released Poker II and Poker III but not a first game, this is your answer. The World of Card Games was known as Poker in some regions, but was more widely available as this Sachen cart. There are four card games here supposedly originating from different parts of the world. Omnibus Hearts is a variation on the standard game Hearts, the only rule change being that the 10 of Diamonds earns you 10 points. Fan Tan plays a lot like Dominoes (albeit with playing cards, obviously), Chinese Rummy is a slightly more complicated version of traditional Rummy, and The Clock – also known as Clock Solitaire – has you laying out 12 stacks of cards in a circle and trying to upturn them all. ■

FACT

There's really no skill involved in The Clock, since each card you upturn determines your next step. The NES version, then, involves just pressing the A button continually until you see whether you won.

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